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Doyen of Czech and Comparative Literature, and
an Authority in Contemporary Literary Theory,
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The Architecture of Calcutta: Aesthetics and the Raj

JANE DURAN

The art of India contains many underexamined categories and constructs, but one particularly underutilized area for analysis is that of the architectural achievements of the British Raj.¹ Although it might be argued that these works are reflective only of a certain sort of nineteenth century colonial mentality, it is important to note that they constitute, currently, many of the sites of interest in major Indian cities, and that certain of the buildings in today's Calcutta and Bombay—now known by their Indian names, Kolkotha and Mumbai—are landmarks shown to visitors on any tour.

In addition to providing a focal point for commentary on British colonialism in India, a large number of the buildings constructed by the English over a century or more are fascinating architecturally in their own right. They make the sort of statement that often provokes critics to extensive comment. As David Goldblatt has written with respect to the notion of the eclectic in architecture:

When Venturi claims that modern architecture lacks diversity, he primarily means that it fails to achieve what he calls a pluralism. What he calls for is 'Scarlatti and the Beatles, if diversity is to be achieved.' ... What Venturi is advocating is eclecticism.²

There is a very real and genuine sense in which the architecture of the Raj achieves an eclecticism on its own, and this provides for further interest in this visually stunning style. But Calcutta, with its enormous complexity, is also a place of jarring contrasts. Part of the impact of the colonial buildings stems from their presence in the midst of the surrounding poverty.

I

Dominique Lapierre, in *City of Joy*, has written of the effect of one of the Georgian manor houses in an area close to some of the city's most formidable slums.

Several evenings later Max's taxi passed through a grand portal guarded by two armed sentries....[H]e caught sight of the colonnades of a vast Georgian residence at the end of the driveway.... The magnificent structure really did seem to have emerged from a dream.

Built at the beginning of the last century by a British magnate in the jute industry, it was one of the residences that had earned Calcutta its nickname, "the City of Palaces."³

The original intention of the architecture of Calcutta imposed by the British was not merely to transmit British values, of course—it was to transmit the idea of dominance. And the effect was well achieved, since it is clear that the sheer size and scale of the buildings, placed as they were in areas that were comparatively flat, made an overwhelming impression. The use of colonnades, cupolas and other such devices merely increased the sense of size, and the effect might best be described, as Lapierre does above, as "dream-like."

The Victoria Memorial, New Market, Dalhousie Square and other such areas in Calcutta were intended not only to transport the values of the West to Bengal, but to make a statement by their sheer monumentality. Perhaps the architects were prompted at least in part by the response of Western visitors to some of the classic Hindu sculpture of the Bengal and Orissa area, such as the Konarak temple. In any case, size and complexity of design in the façade mark these areas. The number of windows, eaves and false front devices on most of the buildings seem to signal that presence can be marked by sheer abundance: as a recent writer has observed, "Every guidebook will opine on the sights of Dalhousie Square."⁴

In addition, it was, of course, important to the British to try to create as much of an atmosphere of familiarity as possible. This was at first difficult, but became increasingly easy as Calcutta and various parts of India began to generate the kind of wealth that had prompted colonization in the first place. Geoffrey Moorhouse's careful and lengthy *Calcutta* provides a detailed view of the two hundred years or more that it took before the changes implemented by the colonizers began to exhibit the yields that had been expected.⁵ Toward the end of the nineteenth century, a genuine bridge across the Hooghly had been achieved, a telephone system had been installed, and tens of thousands of British lived in Bengal. As life in that area began to resemble what the British at least remembered or fantasized that their lives had once been, the sorts of architectural achievements for which Calcutta is to this day renowned became increasingly common.⁶

Of the Victoria Memorial, Moorhouse writes:

It echoes inside, as it was doubtless meant to echo forever and a day. It echoes most resonantly under the dome, in the Queen's Hall whose walls have been deeply graven with the text of Victoria's proclamation of herself as Empress. But reverberations of those illustrious days pursue the visitor...wherever he goes...⁷

Many of the large promenades and parks, including the Maidan, were originally intended for such typically colonial activities as martial parades and games of cricket.

Moorhouse notes that, well into the period after independence, some of the features of colonial life were still at work, partly because of the many holdovers in terms of administrative offices and partly simply because the plan of the city tended to encourage such activities.⁸

II

It could be argued that part of what drove the architectural plan of Calcutta, even if only unconsciously, was a desire on the part of the colonials to replicate not only the style of their homeland, but the scope and grandeur of what they had encountered in Hindu temple work. This might not seem to be a promising hypothesis, but all available accounts indicate that nearby temples, particularly Konarak, in the state of Orissa, made an overwhelming impression on the British visitors to the site, and that impression must have been in the minds of some as the architectural plan of Calcutta was envisaged.⁹

All of the available evidence suggests that size, scope and plasticity of carving were among those elements of Hindu stonework that made the greatest impression on visitors from the West. If we can accept Janet Wolff's thesis that categorizations of work done in certain styles are generally made on the basis of a few leading indicators of the style, taken from works deemed to be exemplary, we can see how size and scale became focal points for all things Indian.¹⁰

It appears that an important beginning category employed by those who viewed Konarak had to do with the interplay between line and form. The curvilinearity and plasticity of the stonework was stunning, and perhaps had little or no parallel in European art. Line, surface decoration and enormity all combined in the Orissa temple (and many other Hindu temples) to achieve a stunning visual effect. Although we cannot be sure of the overall impact on consciousness made by the discovery of this work, it could be said that the British began to want to dominate the Indian landscape in a way such as to counter, or in some ways to parallel, the religious and philosophical effects of the temples themselves. What both styles of architecture, if that term may be used, have in common is that they are far from understated. Thus an attempt to bring the culture of the West into Calcutta almost invariably involved massive monuments and buildings, on a scale perhaps seldom used or even unnecessary in Britain itself.

Wolff's work on the concept of the "modern" is based largely on her attempts to deal with the categorization of certain artists at the beginning of the twentieth century, and one of her leading points is that exclusion tells us a great deal about categorization.¹¹ Her overall point, however, is well-taken—insofar as architecture of the Raj is concerned, it is clear that there were desiderata to which the work had to conform.

III

The Maidan, and two or three of the buildings along it, constitute one of the most powerful colonial statements in Calcutta. The importance of the walkway and the balancing of the Ochterlony Monument with the Fort at the opposite end of the Maidan not only continues the notion that Britain had—literally—paved Calcutta, but achieves the grandeur for which monuments in Britain itself were noted in a new and unusual

way. Moorhouse writes:

The Maidan's biggest old totem is still in place, presumably because it was too big even for the Communist Government to shift into limbo with all the other monuments to the Raj. There are 165 fluted feet of the Ochterlony Monument, which is forty feet less than the Monument to the Great Fire of London.¹²

Not only were the buildings monumental, but the uses to which they were put recapitulated the notion of colonial ascendancy and the trajectory that a Hindu would have to accomplish to become educated in this new environment. In his classic *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance*, David Kopf argues that the dual functions of the architecture of the Raj were exemplified in the mortar and intent of the College of Fort William:

At that time [1804] the College of Fort William was facing the real danger of extinction.... Work commenced by 1805 on the Asiatic Society building at its present site on Park Street and Chowringhee. When the building was completed in 1808, the first fully-equipped institution in the world for the advancement of Asian studies began to function.¹³

If architecture may be said to constitute a way of breaking up space, it is important to note that the works of Calcutta accomplished that task in such a way as to form a contrast, as we have indicated, with the classic Hindu works and to indicate that a voyage, so to speak, would need to be made by any Indian who wanted to participate in the new scheme of things. The spaciousness of the Maidan, its size and the length of its walkways, and the straight and narrow cornices of its buildings made a very strong and contrasting statement to the curvilinearity of major Hindu temples. If Hinduism expresses a certain view of life gone riot, so to speak, the works of the Raj express Euro dominance, both culturally and financially. That the British could afford to construct the buildings at all was an indicator of how successful their economic exploitation of their colony was, and that they would choose to construct buildings completely dissimilar, in spirit and style, to the local architecture said a great deal about their overall intentions. As Robert Sowers has argued, the primary characteristic of an architecture or architectural monument is the way in which it forces us to confront a space.¹⁴ The British broke up the space of Calcutta as a city in such a way as to inform all who lived in the region of the culture that was to influence the area's future.

Sowers has a great deal to say about architecture and its relationship to the other arts, and he does so in a way that helps us to understand the importance of Raj architecture in Calcutta. He writes:

Conceived as an either-or choice between unity and duality, absolutes that are inviolable and irreconcilable, the relation between art

and architecture becomes a hopeless paradox. But just as the relation between black and white is neither one thing nor a ragtag collection of things but a seamless scale of gray values, so in this case: once we take into account all the elements that can unify or separate art and architecture to varying degrees, the paradox disappears and the range of possibilities becomes apparent.¹⁵

What Sowers is claiming is that what we count as “architectural” varies according to context, and the same may be said of any of the tropes of the visual arts. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Calcutta.

The green shutters on the buildings make a statement of color that plays out against the palette of the city. The cornices and inset windows on many of the buildings make the same statement, vis-à-vis and with respect to that architectural style, that the spokes of the chariot of the sun at the Konarak temple make in that particular context. The space is not only carved up, but the carving is done in such a way that individual items on the buildings are as much objets d’art as the celestial nymphs at Konarak, or, indeed, even the image of Vishnu. Again, although we cannot be sure that the British had any such scheme in mind when they began their projects, they succeeded in dominating the relevant space.

IV

In their attempt to establish an architecture in Calcutta that signaled the full complexity of the Raj and its relationship to the surrounding Hindu and Muslim cultures, there is also the chance that the British had, at least to some extent, been impressed by the extant Islamic works available in Northern India. Although these would have been fewer in number in West Bengal, Islamic art in general has always made such a substantial impression on its viewers that we cannot leave this hypothesis unexamined. As Holland Cotter noted in a journalistic piece published years ago, Islamic work has a boundary-trespassing quality that—like Sowers’ use of the shifting modalities between the architectural and the visual arts—puts viewers in a certain contemplative state of mind. Much of what falls under the rubric “Islamic art” was intended, originally, for utilitarian purposes, and yet achieves a certain status on its own. Cotter notes that these objects—and, indeed, Islamic public space—need to be examined in a certain way.

But where [do we place these objects that might be termed “craft”]? In the home? In a school? In a mosque? ...seen out of context it is often hard to tell from its form alone what role a particular object was meant to play. A carpet is both to sit on and to pray on. An alabaster window carved with a pretty floral design may have been intended for a harem or a tomb.... In these ambiguities Islamic art again asserts its

distance from the Westerner accustomed to firm lines between things sacred and profane....¹⁶

Although the boundary shifts about which Cotter is writing may, in a sense, be fuller and more fluid, Moorhouse seems to see something of the same happening to the visitor at Raj Bhavan, the Government House at the extreme end of the Maidan.¹⁷ This building was intended to be a direct replica of a similar architectural achievement in Derbyshire, and it leaves the visitor dazzled with staircases, statuary in the form of sphinxes and Caesars, and four wings and three floors. The full import of the British achievement is perhaps best captured by Moorhouse when he writes that Lord Curzon held a centenary ball there, about which a visitor at the time wrote “We became our grandparents again, imitating in spirit...[the] stately men who danced in these very halls a century ago.”¹⁸

In general, then, we can make two or three points with respect to the architecture of the Raj with a fair amount of certainty. The first—and this would be hard to dispute—is that it was intended to establish a sense of dominance and empire, and an impression so strong in whoever happened to take note of the structures that the viewer could not help but be awed by the achievements of the builders. The second (and this, obviously, can be stated only with less certainty, since we have comparatively little evidence) is that the British themselves may have felt stricken in the presence of the mammoth Hindu temples of the North and South, or, perhaps, the Mogul works of the North. The third point is that a certain sort of eclecticism, of the very kind that, according to Goldblatt, Venturi wants to see in contemporary architecture marks most of the salient works of the Raj in Calcutta. Indeed, they might be thought to constitute a sort of architectural hodgepodge, albeit one that in itself certainly can be said to exemplify a style.

V

I have been arguing that the architecture of Calcutta, world-renowned and mentioned in almost any account of the more important sights of India, is a special case of cultural dominance and pluralistic architectural style. None of this would be so remarkable in and of itself were it not also the case that the “Jewel in the Crown” of the British Empire—colonial India, which today comprises India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and even in a sense Sri Lanka—has an importance historically simply because of its size, the scope of the original extant civilization, and the lengths to which the colonizers went to retain the territory.

Christopher Hitchens, in his recent *God is Not Great*, is primarily concerned to argue against fundamental interpretations of religion, but has a number of salient cultural points to make as well.¹⁹ In his discussion of the disagreements between Hindus and Muslims that led, ultimately, to the truncating of colonial India after independence, Hitchens describes in some detail the gradual decline in colonial power of Great Britain and the resurgence of Hindu culture:

After the critical weakening of the British Empire by the First World War, and most

particularly after the notorious massacre of Indian protestors at the city of Amritsar in April 1919, it became apparent even to the then controllers of the subcontinent that rule from London would come to an end sooner rather than later.... [The general project] was made much easier by Gandhi's talk of Hinduism and by the long ostentatious hours he spent...tending his spinning wheel.²⁰

This piece of historical information—albeit having to do with a period well after the initial establishment of the Raj—is telling because it lets us know in specific terms precisely how difficult it was for Britain to maintain its presence in India and what a unifying effect certain tropes of Hinduism, such as the spinning wheel, might have on the population. It is for these reasons, then, along with nostalgia and a taste for things Western, that the city of Calcutta was given such stupendous architectural works and that it became important to build continuously, with larger and more ornate structures, in order to make an impressive show of force.

This alone should give us reason to appreciate the colonial architecture of Calcutta, and to emphasize its stature as an accomplishment of Westerners in the Eastern world.

In his article on Venturi's attack on modernism, Goldblatt closes by noting that "The world of the 1980s seems no less chaotic and complex than the world at the beginning of this century...."²¹ The same, of course, might well be said of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when so much of what became the important architecture of Calcutta was constructed. Goldblatt ends by noting that "the refreshing architectural acts" of postmodernism will remain with us, but so, of course, will many other styles from many other periods.²² The Raj architecture of Calcutta does not have the classicism of the Greek Doric, or the peculiar ornamentation of the Mexican colonial architecture of Puebla. Nevertheless, it remains valuable in its own right, not only as an artistic and architectural accomplishment, but as a standing testament to the once dominant status of certain European cultures.

Notes and References

1. The classic work in this area, for example, Benjamin Rowland's *The Art and Architecture of India*, Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1967, does not contain any analysis of this work.
2. David Goldblatt, "The Frequency of Architectural Acts: Diversity and Quantity in Architecture," in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. XLVI, No. 1 (Fall 1987), pp. 61-66. This citation p. 62.
3. Dominique Lapierre, *The City of Joy*, New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1985, p. 346.
4. Somini Sengupta, "A Walk in Calcutta," in *The New York Times*, (Travel Section, p. 9), May 3, 2009.
5. Geoffrey Moorhouse, *Calcutta*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 65-66.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 220.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 217. As he writes, "People play crown green bowls under floodlights at night on the Maidan."
9. See Rowland, Art, pp. 173-4.
10. Janet Wolff, *AngloModern: Painting and Modernity in Britain and the United States*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 66. Wolff is largely concerned about the exclusion of the artist Kathleen McEnery.
12. Moorhouse, *Calcutta*, p. 217.
13. David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969, p. 69.
14. Robert Sowers, *Rethinking the Forms of Visual Expression*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.
15. *Ibid.*, Sowers, p. 57.
16. Holland Cotter, "Art and Allah in Andalusia," in *Art in America*, Vol. 80, No. 10, 1992, p. 113.
17. Moorhouse, *Calcutta*, pp. 222-223.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 223.
19. Christopher Hitchens, *God is Not Great*, New York: Hachette Book Group, 2009.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 182.
21. Goldblatt, p. 66.
22. *Ibid.*,

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AT SANTA BARBARA

Old English and Arabic Panegyric Poetry

MOHAMED KAMELABDEL-DAEM

Looking retroactively at the old English and Arabic poetry, one may be identified with the fact that a great deal of verse depended upon panegyric elements in order to adapt to the atmosphere of conflict prevailing at the time. Both English and Arab poets used poetry to commend alive or dead people: heroes, knights, holy figures and nobles. This study tries to hold a comparison between the panegyric features used in earlier English and Arabic poetry. A panegyric is defined as:

a formal... written verse, delivered in high praise of a person or thing, a generally high studied discriminating eulogy, not expected to be critical. In Athens such speeches were delivered at national festivals or games, with the object of rousing the citizens to emulate the glorious deeds of their ancestors...the Romans confined the panegyric to the living, and reserved the funeral oration exclusively for the dead... in 336, Eusebius of Caesarea gave a panegyric of Constantine the Great ... in which he broke from tradition by celebrating the piety of the emperor, rather than his secular achievements ... Qasida is panegyric poetry in Arabic (*Wikipedia*)

Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms defines the panegyric genre as:

a public speech or written composition devoted to the prolonged, effusive praise of some person, group of people, or public body... this branch of rhetoric was particularly cultivated in ancient Greece and Rome, and Middle-Ages Europe

In pre-Islamic Arabia, panegyric functioned as:

a means of extolling the virtues of the tribe and its leaders[this is called fakhr (pride)]... it was immediately adopted in the cause of Islam... Hassan ibn Thabit, often referred to as the Prophet's poet, composed panegyrics in praise of [the Prophet] recording his victories in strident tones... with the first dynasty of Caliphs, panegyric became a major propaganda device used to glorify Islam and its successes. (*Encyclopedia Britannica*)

The panegyric can be obviously realized in the heroic attitude of the old English heathen poets, and in the pride of the *Jahili* Arab poets. The old English poet believed in superstition and heroism "with a sense of endurance, of fate, and of unfailing courage revealing a spirit that is never completely recaptured in any later period"(Evans 19).The poets sang of the ceremonies dedicated to their gods, the magic properties of nature

and hymns devoted for royal sanctuaries. A lot of verses were addressed to Erce, the mother of the earth, to endow the fields with her blessings and to secure their fertility. Poems such as *Beowulf*, "The Seafarer", "Deor", "The Wanderer" and "The Ruin" show that the poets were interested in the adventurous life of the sea. The poems reflect the struggle between man and monsters, between sailors and the stormy weather:

For the harp he has no heart, nor for having of the rings,
Nor in woman is his weal; in the world he's no delight,
Nor in anything whatever save the tossing o'er the waves!
O for ever he has longing who is urged towards the sea.

(*The Seafarer*)

Before working the leaven of Islam in Arabia, the Arabs were scattered into conflicting clans that produced the so-called *Jahili* poetry (the poetry of the period of ignorance). The pre-Islamic poets partly focused on poems to praise figures or tribes, descriptions of battles, and the dangerous desert life. They sang of their pride of themselves and their clans who showed courage in war(Amin 69). Here are some lines from the *Mu'laqat*(old Arabic epics):

و ما الحرب الا ما علمتم، و ذقتم
و ما هو، عنها، بالحديث المرمج
متى تبعثوها تبعثوها، ذميمة
و تضر، اذا ضر يئتموها، فتضرم

.....

لدى أسد، شاكي السلاح، مفاذف
له لبد، أظفاره لم تقلم
جرىء، متى يظلم يعاقب، بظلمه
سريعا، و الا يبد بالظلم يظلم

(Diwan Zuhayr ibn Abi Sulma)

You experienced the terrors of war before.
This was previously known to you.
Launching it again is utterly rejected
It would harm you if you light it

.....

Like a lion, we are well-armed, with arrows,
(a lion) that has sinews and fatal claws,
He is bold, and immediately punishes, those who wronged him
He only wrongs those who previously did (to him)

(translation's mine)

After the advent of Christianity in England and Islam in Arabia, people ceased to be loyal to the polytheistic idols or gods. The Anglo-Saxon poets wrote religious poems in which they praised God's creations, the Christ (pbuh) and the saints, showing the

merits of converting to Christianity. According to Bede, Caedmon, the first Christian English poet, became poet after an angel visited him and ordered him to sing the “Song of Creation” (Bede IV, ch 24,10):

Now we must praise the Guardian of the kingdom of heaven,
The might of the Creator and the thought of His mind,
The work of the Father of men, as He, the Eternal Lord,
Formed the beginning of every wonder

(Caedmon's Hymn)

This poem panegyrically presents accounts of creation based on translations of the Old and New Testaments that are included in the Bible which is:

a composite book, consisting of two main sections– the Old Testament and the New. The Old Testament, originally written mainly in Hebrew, is a collection of poems, plays, proverbs, prophecy, philosophy, history, theology– a massive anthology of writings of the ancient Jewish people. The New Testament, originally written in Greek, contains the Gospels and the story of the spreading of Christianity by its first propagandists... The Old Testament Apocrypha consists of historical and philosophical writings. The New Testament Apocrypha gives... further details of the lives of the Apostles, the birth and resurrection of Christ, etc. (Burgess 39).

Bede reports that Caedmon “could never compose any foolish or trivial poem, but only those which were concerned with devotion” (Bede IV, ch 24,16). In *Christ and Satan*, Caedmon speaks about the terrors of the day of judgment, horrors of hell and joys of the heavenly paradise. The first part of the poem deals with the fall of the angels; the second is about the resurrection of Christ (pbuh) and the harrowing hell, together with a brief account of his ascension and coming to judgment; the third part tells about how Satan tried to tempt the Christ (pbuh). In *Genesis*, Caedmon makes a poetical paraphrase of the first of the canonical books in the Old Testament, extending to the story of Abraham’s sacrifice of his son. The poem opens with the praise of the Creator, then proceeds to relate the revolt and fall of the angels, and then the creation of the earth and the tale of the Satan who avenged himself by tempting man as a result of having fallen from his high estate. In *Exodus*, the poet tells the story of the Israelites’ passage through the Red Sea and the destruction of Pharaoh’s host. In *Daniel*, we learn about the life of St. Daniel and his attempts to inculcate moral virtues.

Cynewulf, another significant Anglo-Saxon poet, produced a great deal of verse, praising religious figures and virtues. In *Guthlac*, Cynewulf relates the life of the Mercian saint, Guthlac. The wondrous light that shines over Guthlac’s hut before he dies obviously recalls the glamorous lights of the sky. When the saint enters into the heavenly mansions, the whole English land trembles with rapture. Then the poet moves into the saint’s last great struggle with the powers of darkness and death. *The Dream of the Rood* tackles the story of crucifixion, showing the cross as a provider of confidence and help. Like his polytheist predecessors, the poet arrests the attention of his audience by: “Lo, Listenth, lordings”. The device must have been a common one in days when the

harp was struck at festive gatherings (Watts 201). In *Crist*, Cynewulf deals with the advent of Christ (pbuh) on earth, his ascension, then his second advent to judge the world. *Elene* tells the story of finding the cross by St Helena, the mother of the Roman emperor Constantine. The conversion of the emperor is carried out when he sees a vision of the cross in the sky. Thus, the cross was “transmuted from being a symbol of ignominy to a symbol of glory”, and it began to be extolled (Brown 23). In *Andreas*, we see how St Andrew converts the Mermedonians by working miracles.

In Arabia, the earlier Muslim poets did their best to defend the new faith, support the Prophet (pbuh) and approve of the value of monotheism. Hassan ibn Thabit was the Prophet’s poet or spokesman. During the life of the Prophet, and afterwards, he composed a number of poems which advocate the new creed and expound the Islamic belief and ideology. For example, when a delegation from Tamim came to the Prophet to embrace Islam and declare their allegiance, they asked their poet to say some verses in praise of their clan. Replying to this pride, Hassan said:

ان الذوائب من فهر و اخوتهم	قد بينوا سننا للناس تتبع
يرضى بها كل من كانت سريرته	تقوى الاله و بالامر الذي شرعوا
قوم اذا حاربوا ضروا عدوهم	او حاولوا النفع في اشيائهم نفعا
سجية تلك فيهم غير محدثة	ان الخلاق فاعلم شرها البدع
ان كان في الناس سباقون بعدهم	فكل سبق لادنى سبقهم تبع
أكرم بقوم رسول الله قائدهم	اذا تفرقت الأهواء و الشيع

(Diwan Hassan ibn Thabit)

The clans of Fehr and their brothers
Showed people rules to be followed,
Satisfying only those who sincerely
Fear God and accept His orders
Those people can harm their enemy
And they are helpful to friends
They are hires of this merit,
People find new ideas unsafe
If this was done before, then
Those who did this before should follow them
Nobody is more honourable than a nation led by
Allah’s Prophet when people are scattered into sects

(translations mine)

The Muslims fought the polytheists with their swords in the battlefield, while Hassan and the other Muslim poets attacked those disbelievers with their tongues (Bakalla 136). In these lines, the poet asserts that the Muslims adhere to the instructions of Allah (Glory be to Him) and His Prophet. They teach these lessons to other people in order to get into the way of righteousness. This makes the Muslims one unified nation under the leadership of the Prophet to whom Allah’s guidance was revealed.

Earlier Islamic poetry (and the panegyric in particular) has been apparently dyed by the Qur'an and the Prophet's sayings:

The influence of the Qur'an on the development of Arabic literature has been incalculable, and exerted in many directions. Its ideas, its language, its rhythms pervade all subsequent literary works... though the standard of literary Arabic was in fact set not by the Qur'an but by the heathen poets, it was due to the position of the Qur'an as "Bible, prayer-book" ... that Arabic became... the common literary medium of all Muslim poets (Gibb 36).

After the great Muslim victory over the pagans in the battle of Badr, Abu-Sufian and the other pagans were filled with furiousness, so he ordered the infidel poets to lampoon the Prophet. Hassan defended the Prophet, saying:

هجوت محمدا فأجبت عنه و عند الله في ذلك الجزاء
فان أبي و والداه و عرضي لعرض محمد منكم وقاء
أتهجوه و لست له بكفاء فشركما لخيركما الفداء

You have attacked Muhammad; here is my reply
For which Allah will reward me.
I offer my father, grandfathers and family as
A shield that protects Muhammad's honour from your attack
You lampooned him though you are not as noble as him
You(the wicked) are to be sacrificed for the honour of him(the good)
(translation's mine)

The poets also praised the Prophet and believed that he worked hard and sincerely to take them away from the path leading to Hell:

أتيت رسول الله اذا جاء بالهدى و يتلو كتابا كمالجرة نيرا
أقيم على التقوى و أوصى بفعلها و كنت من النار المخوفة أحررا
(Diwan Al-Nabigha Al-Ja'di)

Accompanying Allah's Messenger who came with guidance,
Reciting a book that is as illuminating as the sun,
I stuck to righteousness, and advise others to do so
Also, I became away from what lead to the harrowing hell
(translation's mine)

When the Prophet died, Abu-Sufian ibn Al-Harith lamented his death in lines that show sorrow and strong faith in fate and Allah's will:

فقدنا الوحي و التنزيل فينا يروح به و يغدو جبرئيل
و ذاك أحق ما سالت عليه نفوس الناس أو كادت تسيل
فلم نر مثله في الناس حيا و ليس له من الموتى بديل
(Diwan Abu Sufian ibn Al Harith)

We lost Allah's revelation to us,
Of which Gabriel was a messenger

No other ordeal deserves that people' souls
Are really(or almost) tormented by
.....
For he has no living peer
And no dead alternative

(translation's mine)

Beowulf, *The Wanderer*, and the *Battle of Maldon* best exemplify the use of heroism in old English pagan poetry:

This heroic spirit manifested itself most strongly in the desire for fame and glory... the code of conduct stressed the reciprocal obligations of lord and thanes... a mutuality that was the core of the comitatus relationship described as early as A.D.98 (Greenfield 80).

Many scholars regard the compositional method in old English religious poems (Caedmon's Hymn and the *Dream of the Rood*, for instance) as an adoption of panegyric epithets to the praise of God and the Christ(pbuh). The heroic descriptions in these poems have derived their inspiration from the psalms (Lapidge 65).

Akiko Motoyoshi Sumi thinks that:

The Arabic panegyric genre potentially contains both a literary portrait of the patron[or the object being praised] and a poet's self-portrait[fakhr] in one and same ode: a double portrait. Portraiture is a representation or description of a human subject, and it can be visual, verbal or musical (155).

In *Doctrine and Poetry: Augustine's Influence on Old English Poetry*, Bernard F. Huppe outlines the influence of Christian doctrine upon old English poetry. The poets paraphrased stories from the Bible, aiming at advocating the new Christian beliefs ,and the promotion of charity to the end that God may be pleased; the true basis for eloquence is the truth in the meaning of words, not in the words themselves. This was felt not only in the interpretation of poetry but in its creation as well (29-64).

In *Al-sh 'ir fi Mawkeb Al-Da 'wa* (Poetry in the Procession of Islam's Call), Sadeq Abdel-Halim Mohamed shows that the early Muslim poets started a tradition of supporting the new faith by highlighting the merits of embracing Islam, the Prophet(pbuh) and his companions. He believes that only righteous and faithful figures could produce poetry. He considers some poets who defended the Islamic call and its Messenger (35-134).

Sung-II Lee claims that the theme of mutability (inspired by heroic spirit) recurs in many old English poems: *Beowulf*, *The Wanderer*, *The Ruin*.... etc. (Lee, 1999). He thinks that the Anglo-Saxon poets strongly believed in the transience of life and in the power of fate that turns whatever man can attain. They courageously believed that there are things worse than death, and that "Death is better for every knight than ignominious life"

David Lyle Jeffrey views the Bible as a source book for many English literary works. He asserts that "Biblical aesthetics is really another form of bibliolatry (i.e., we must study the Bible because of its supposed superior literary beauty)". He urges

literary scholars to “adjust their approaches and goals... where the Bibles competes in a highly diversified global textual market”. He sees that the history of the Bible as literature started with St. Augustine who paved the way for the Anglo-Saxon poets to create verse interpretations of the holy book. (540-44).

The impact of the Qur'an on Arabic poetry has been examined by E.M.H. Omran in “Islam, the Qur'an and the Arabic Literature”. He points to the linguistic influence of the Qur'an on Arabic language and poetry, which appears to be unique in its extent and durability. The Qur'an has undoubtedly provided poets with an unparalleled level of linguistic excellence and eloquence. It helped reinforce and deepen the Arab poets' awareness of the richness and grandeur of their tongue (1-5).

In *Beowulf*, the hero battles three antagonists and beats two, but in the final battle, he is fatally wounded, dies and buried in a tumulus in Geatland:

High o'er his head they hoist the standard,
A gold-wove banner; let billows take him,
Gave him to ocean. Grave were their spirits,

.....
No hero 'neath heaven, - who harbored that freight!

The heroic virtues in the poem are evidently the Anglo-Saxon's as “the majority view appears to be that people... in *Beowulf* are based on real people in the 6th century Scandinavia, and that the poem is contextually based on folktale type” (Anderson 115). Although Hrothgar and Beowulf are portrayed as:

morally upright pagans, they fully espouse and frequently affirm values of Germanic heroic poetry... depicting warrior society, the most important of human relationships was that which existed between the warrior and his lord, a relationship based less on subordination of one man's will to another's than on mutual trust and respect (Abrams 30).

Ka'b ibn Zuhayr presents a prototypical example of the panegyric, based on pride:

فان تسأل الأقوام عني فأننى أنا ابن أبي سلمى على رغم من رغم
أنا ابن الذي قد عاش تسعين حجة فلم يخر يوما في معد و لم يلم
و أكرمه الأكفاء في كل معشر كرام، فان كذبتني فاسأل الأمم
.....
أقول شيبهات بما قال عالما بهن و من يشبه أباه فما ظلم

(Diwan Ka'b ibn Zuhayr)

If you ask people, they tell you who I am
I am ibn Abi-Sulma's son, whether you know or not
My father lived till he was ninety
He was never ridiculed or blamed
He was honoured by the leaders of every noble tribe
People may assure you that I tell the truth
.....

I follow the art of his verse(of which he was a master)
Like father, like son, no wonder

(translation's mine)

The poet zealously praises himself and his origins as he seemed to be decisive in attacking his rivals. Stefan Sperl interprets the significance of the panegyric practice through explaining the different cultural components of the hard nomadic existence, reflected in the formulae and epithets which describe the power of individual poets and their clans. The poets ascribed heroic virtues to themselves and their tribes: resolution, equanimity, nobility, generosity and steadfastness (20-35).

In the *Dream of the Rood*, Cynewulf praises the Christ(pbu) as a Saviour of all human beings:

Then the young hero (who was God Almighty)
Got ready, resolute and strong in heart.
...the warrior embraced [the cross]

.....
He climbed onto the lofty gallows-tree
Bold in the sight of many watching men,
When He intended to redeem mankind.

.....
And then I saw the Lord of all mankind
Hasten with eager zeal that he
Might mount upon me.

Jeannette C. Brock states that the poet:

depicts Christ as a purposeful courageous warrior who boldly confronts and defeats sin... instead of simply using the word “Christ”, the poet calls Jesus “the young hero” and “mankind's brave king”. These images create a vivid image of Christ which echoes the description of Beowulf who is praised as a “king”, “the hero”, and a “valiant warrior”... later, the poet suggests that Christ actually initiates the battle to redeem mankind. The poet emphasizes the voluntariness of Christ's undertaking of crucifixion (1-19).

Ka'b ibn Zuhayr portrays how he had deserted his old heathen habits, and referred to the merits of embracing Islamic beliefs that stem from worshipping The One:

ان الرسول لنور يستضاء به في عصابة من قریش قال قائلهم زولوا فمالزال أنكاس ولاكشف شم لعرائن أبطال لبوسهم بيض سوابغ قد شكت لها حلق لبسوا مفاريح ان نالت رماحهم لا يقع الطعن الا في نحورهم	مهند من سيوف الله مسلول ببطن مكة لما أسلموا زولوا عند اللقاء ولا ميل معازيل من نسج داود في الهيجا سراويل كانها حلق القفعاء مجدول قوما و لبسوا مجازيعا اذانيلا و مالهم عن حياض الموت تهليل
---	--

(“Banat Soád” [Soád has gone away])

In these lines, the poet declares that he is guided to Allah's path by the light of the Prophet who is one of Allah's swords that fight evil. The Prophet's companions emigrated from Makkah to Madinah when they grasped the true meaning of monotheism. They show great bravery in battle even if they are not well-armed or well-shielded. Their bravery has resulted from their strong faith which is seen in their outer appearance. They are neither exaggeratingly happy when they are victorious nor horribly sad when they are defeated. But they become truly happy when they are killed in battle. These ideas are evidently inspired by the Qur'an and Hadith.

Q.A. Dandrawy reads Ka'b's poem as a panegyric of the development of the poet's self from a past indiscretion to a present righteousness:

The poem has a Jahili opening which tells about a bygone love affair. His deserting beloved is nothing but his lost self which he wants to restore by following the Prophet's way. He starts a long, tiring journey riding his camel in the desert to look for his lost self till he reaches Makkah and meets the Prophet. Then he praises the Prophets and his companions as soon as his heart is illuminated by Allah's guidance. This illustrates the old proverb: he who knows his own self can get to knowing his own God (104-54).

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The Sameness of Existing in a Meaningless Reality : Boris Vian's *L'herbe rouge* and Murakami Haruki's *IQ84*

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Murakami Haruki (1949-) has not been really influenced by the literary works of Boris Vian (1920-1959). However, both writers have been deeply influenced by Franz Kafka's works : according to Gilbert Pestureau, it was clearly the case in Boris Vian's *L'herbe rouge* (182). In his novel *IQ84*, Murakami has referred to Kafka's works (*IQ84-1* 12 ; *IQ84-3* 275). Both Vian and Murakami are concerned with what-it-means-to-exist. The sameness of existing is reflected in various paradigmatic life experiences : loneliness, anxiety, and despair, fault and guilt, suffering and death, said Murakami (*IQ84-1* 373). Any meaning of life is basically subjected to existential doubt. As it is interpreted in a meaningless reality, the sameness of existing requires existential doubt. That's why truth is never conceived as a given set of beliefs, values, virtues, rituals and practices. Both Vian and Murakami believed that Truth-itself does not exist. Rather, truth is a dialogical process that implies to face others' truth claims. Being is communication, and communication is being. Truth is nothing but the communicational exchange of truth claims, said Karl Jaspers (2003, 205-249). In a way or another, Vian and Murakami criticized Truth-itself, and more generally, the thing-in-itself. Everything remains unknown since there is no-thingness. There is no in-itself. Essence does not exist. Truth is nothing but an existential quest and implies communicational exchanges. As dialogical process, truth is much more connected with the unknown than with knowledge. Vian, and Murakami described the sameness of existing from three basic existential perspectives : (1) the unknown frontiers between good and evil, and the meaning of truth and justice ; (2) the unknowable self ; (3) the unknown basis of existence : what-it-means-to-exist refers to existential categories whose meaning remains unknown : freedom and suffering, temporality, having-to-die and existential anxiety, hope and despair. Vian and Murakami used those three perspectives in order to define existential doubt as the ground of any meaning of life. We will explore the meaning of those existential categories as they are interpreted by Boris Vian (in *L'herbe rouge*) and Murakami Haruki (in *IQ84*).

In Socratic way, Vian believed that we actually know nothing. Our thought is always subjected to prejudices. Insofar as our knowledge is colored by prejudices, how could we know things, persons and phenomena in themselves ? Prejudices are distorting what things, persons, and phenomena seem to be. Every knowledge process is basically linked to prejudices about things, persons, and phenomena. According to Hans-Georg Gadamer (1976, 103-140), prejudices are inherently linked to knowledge processes themselves. Laws and regulations do not get rid of prejudices, although they tend to reduce the propensity to widespread their influence. But is it enough to conform ourselves to laws and regulations ? Does it guarantee that our behavior will be ethically justified ? Laws and regulations constitute a moral minimum. Ethics requires stronger moral standards than those provided by laws and regulations. Ethics is the not parrot of laws and regulations. However, our moral standards must be grounded on objective criteria that could be accepted by the reasonable spectator (Immanuel Kant, John Rawls). Such standards are continuously evolving and are not always universally shared. Ethics is then a permanent questioning about what is good and evil, in given circumstances. Good and evil remain unknown realities. What is a good/wrong action ? Could we avoid wrong actions without undertaking right ones ? According to Vian, I am emptiness. That's why I cannot know the exact frontiers between good and evil. Since I know nothing, I cannot know how I could theoretically distinguish good and evil. I know that there are rules. Conforming myself to a given rule implies to conform myself to all rules. However, when undertaking right actions, I cannot avoid every kind of evil that follows from morally right conducts, since human will is mischievous. Are human beings basically egoistic ? We could be aware of our truth claims. But expressing our truth claims does not unveil anything about our future. Predicting our future is not necessarily true, said Vian (*L'herbe rouge* 48). Truth claims about the nature of good and evil are then only useful for personal decision-making. They cannot unveil anything about the essence of good/evil. According to Vian, we really do not know what is justice/injustice because of the unknowable character of good and evil. But when decision-making is quite difficult, then moral questioning is arising. Decision-makers implicitly embrace given ethical theories (for instance, theories of virtues, philosophical egoism, utilitarianism, Kantianism, theories of justice), so that their moral questioning is determined by the basic principles that characterize such theories. In all cases, decision-makers must take into account all consequences of their actions (in the short-, mid-, and long-term) for all people who are affected by such actions. Most of people find hard to take into account all consequences of their actions. Morally right actions could be undertaken for wrong motives ; they could also have very bad consequences. People often love to see others suffering or being unhappy. Others' suffering could console them about their own existential suffering. People are deeply concerned with their own suffering. That's why the basic (objective) criteria for ethical decision-making are so important. But are they really available to the subjective thinker ?

Murakami strongly criticized a philosophical-egoistic viewpoint. The world is basically unjust, and is thus a world in which we could go ahead with every potentiality-

of-being. Murakami is unveiling an Heideggerian influence (Heidegger 1962, 308, 320-322, 333, 342, 394-395). We have lost the meaning of justice/injustice, since we are too concerned with our self-interest (*IQ84-2* 464). However, it is easier to define injustice than to circumscribe the frontiers between justice and injustice. An imperfect being has useless thoughts, words, and actions. Imperfection requires uselessness. Imperfection needs imagination. If the world would be perfect, human beings would have no imagination, and thus no freedom, any project-to-be. Imagination is required to be being-free. Freedom could not constitute our being if we could stop and even erase our imagination. We could then lose our responsibility toward ourselves as well as toward others. We cannot (and should not) stop our imagination. A perfect world does not exist. And that's fine. According to Emmanuel Levinas (1982, 91-98), I am myself insofar as I am responsible for-others. We are imperfect beings living in an imperfect world. Nobody is perfect : that's why there are potentialities of cooperation and a deep will of collaboration. I must release myself from any necessity of perfection. It is the only way to become who-I-am. Although good and evil cannot be defined, I remain a moral agent : I cannot get rid of moral judgment. It is an integral part of human existence, since human being is being-free. Due to our existential finitude, we are subjected to fault and guilt. Fault and guilt are existentially rooted. That's why I cannot avoid to exert my moral judgment, although I cannot clearly distinguish the frontiers between good and evil.

Murakami is fully aware that good and evil are unknowable realities. Then, we are continuously searching for their meaning and extent. In doing so, we are defining the frontiers of our morality. Perfection does not give any place to imagination. Without a given morality, human being would not exist. Morality provides an equilibrium that makes social and psychological life possible. Sometimes, our egoistic attitudes make others suffering, although it was not our intent to do so. People could be deeply affected by others' suffering. Murakami referred to Fedor Dostoyevsky (2002, 341-342) : what is crucial is to maintain an equilibrium between good and evil. Right actions could have very bad outcomes, while wrong behaviors could have very good results. When we are undertaking right actions, we do not have any precise idea about evil itself. The notion of good is known when evil is actualized. But the notion of evil remains unknown although good actions are undertaken. If evil remains unknown, how could an actualized evil be the criterion for knowing the notion of good ? There is a vicious circle around good and evil, so that we cannot know neither the good, nor the evil. Through socialization processes, we have learned some parameters of good/evil. That's why we are usually undertaking right actions and avoiding wrong conducts. Such habits partly hinder our moral questioning about the nature of good and evil. However, from a theoretical viewpoint, we cannot distinguish good and evil. We could then lose given frontiers between good and evil, since we have built up such frontiers. In an Aristotelian way (Aristotle 1996, 8-10), Murakami asserted that every action/choice is guided by a given notion of good (*IQ84-1* 303-304). But we cannot avoid the issue of good and evil. Human being always questions the nature of good and evil (373). Although

we cannot fully know things, persons, and phenomena, we acquire more and more knowledge about them (310). Our moral behavior is basically determined by two facts : (i) prejudices are an integral part of truth as process and path (41) ; (ii) just effects do not necessarily follow from just motives (418). The absolute good as well as the absolute evil do not exist in the human world. The good is the equilibrium between right and wrong actions, their good and bad consequences, said Murakami (*IQ84-2* 260, 287). Being aware of our personal truth claims is the way to conquer our authentic powers. Truth claims cannot be isolated from suffering (248, 522). Since Truth-itself does not exist, my truth claims are unsatisfying. Moreover, my truth claims will inevitably face others' truth claims. Any dialogue about truth claims will make people more deeply aware of their existential finitude, and then of their impossibility to grasp reality as-it-is. Nobody could claim to own Truth-itself. Everybody conveys truth claims, that is, historically-rooted truths that could be contradicted by others' truth claims. Our truth claims could give guidance to our present way to be, to think and to behave. They could help us to identify our project-to-be (who-I-want-to-become). Truth-itself cannot be grasped, because History is continuously rewritten, said Murakami (284). Truth claims are always relative. Truth claims can never be connected to any notion of Truth-itself (*IQ84-3* 202-203, 223). Then, we will put them in practice, either in words, or in action. We will be responsible for the practical outcomes of our thoughts, dreams, and ideas. As soon as we are born, we have an ethical responsibility, said Wittgenstein (2002, 132). Our moral norms of behavior will then unveil our truth claims. Whether they are socially-induced and/or self-defined, moral norms of behavior are always evolving. Good-itself and Evil-itself do not exist. Only truth claims (about the nature of good/evil) actually exist.

In Kierkegaardian way (1974a, 66), Vian and Murakami acknowledged the subjectivity of the self. According to Vian, dead persons are living the extreme conditions of loneliness : (1) they are free of every existential anxiety ; they will no longer suffer ; (2) they have no memory ; (3) they do not have anything they could be ashamed of. Vian then described their situation as mirroring the only perfection human beings could actually reach (*L'herbe rouge* 142-143). Although loneliness makes an integral part of human existence, the way it is felt is basically subjective. Our loneliness is increasing when we are too deeply concerned with others' judgment. According to Vian, we would be always alone if we would not love ourselves in an absolute way (36, 72). Vian talked about our weak/soft self. He believed that : (1) we wish to conquer such softness/limpness we should be ashamed of ; (2) we are aware that our weak/soft self has been inherited from our relatives. That's why we could hate them ; (3) our body is encline to let our softness/limpness be (70-72). My present self is determined by prior selves. Who-I-am is deeply influenced by my having-been. I cannot really put myself in others' shoes. My self is the only self I am living in (112). Could we really remember our prior selves ? According to Vian, what we remember is only mirroring the new self which has been substituted to the prior self. Any remembering (as well as any body) reflects our prior self as well as the era/milieu in which it has lived (63, 133). The way we are

interpreting our being-alone and our being-with-others could be influenced by the low/high level of self-esteem. However, what is crucial, said Vian, is to remain sincere and honest towards others as well as ourselves. Sincerity and honesty makes possible to be-with-others and to deal with our existential loneliness. I am a subjective thinker, so that I can never claim any kind of objectivity. Objectivity could only be reached by all-knowing beings. But human existence is finite. As said Kierkegaard, human being is nothing but subjective thinker (1974, 313-316).

The awareness of our existential loneliness is the ground of our existing. Nobody loves to be alone. Human existence is nothing but an absolute loneliness. Living beings are existentially alone. Why is it so necessary to be alone throughout our existence? Human being cannot get rid of his/her existential loneliness. Human being is being-alone. Such empirical fact is a phenomenon we must accept. My self is being-alone. To what extent could my self-perception mirror my true self? Physically/psychologically speaking, we are born alone, we live alone (inner life), and we die alone (*IQ84-3162*, 261). As being-alone, I take my responsibilities upon my self (*IQ84-3411*, 442). The feeling to be isolated from others makes me frail. This is a terrifying reality: we are not afraid of our self, but rather of the unknown grounds of our actions, words, and thoughts (*IQ84-1509*). That's why life is so terrifying. According to Murakami, human being is both existentially alone (being-alone) and living with others (being-with-others), whether others are relatives, friends, and even unknown people (*IQ84-2391-392*; *IQ84-3237*). However, I cannot be wholly understood by others. Others have various interpretations of my self: such interpretations do not always unveil who-I-believe-to-be and who-I-want-to-become (my project-to-be). I cannot wholly understand my self (*IQ84-2147*). On one hand, I cannot be sure that who-I-believe-to-be is equivalent to who-I-am. On the other hand, my project-to-be is certainly who-I-am: who—am-becoming is nothing but who-I-wanted-to-become. Part of my self-consciousness cannot be grasped. But I cannot be someone else than who-I-am-here-and-now, that is, who-I-have-decided-to-be. Any attempt to become anybody else than myself is useless. I always remain who-I-want-to-be and cannot get rid of my imperfect self. Imperfection is an integral part of who-I-am, as human (finite) being. What is my true self? Is my present self equivalent to my true self? But in very short delay, I could become unsatisfied with my new self and try to substitute another one. Life is a continuous existential quest of meaning, whether it is the meaning of the self, of the world, of the Nature, of any Infinite/Absolute/God. Is there any original (true) self, that is, a self that was already there, before any new self which had been substituted to it? If there is a true self, then there must be true world, since human being is a being-self-in-the-world (*IQ84-3344*). We cannot live without a true self we are continuously searching for. Through my various selves (one succeeding to the other), I am not who-I-am (a true self), but rather only who-I-want-to-become (*IQ84-3214*). There is a discrepancy between who-I-am and my self-awareness. Is then the self without any substance? My self always remains uncertain. I am always the self that I am in the here-and-now (*IQ84-2158*, 202). I am never satisfied by my own self. That's why I am a project-to-be. I can never know my whole self. I am only who-I-am in

the here-and-now, and thus who-I-have-decided-to-become in a more or less recent past. My self is the self which is observing my thinking self. It is my own prison and hell. In a Proustian way (Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve* 207; *Albertine disparue* 126), Murakami believed that every human being has various selves: each self has been replaced by another. I cannot escape my self. The enemy lives in my self. In my self, there is an anti-self. The anti-self is the self that contradicts my present self: it is the self which will replace my present self. The anti-self will become my new self, so that new anti-self will eventually arise, and so forth. I am my self, and nobody else. Even my anti-self is my self. It is the self I am becoming. There is a moment when my present self is replaced by a new self (or anti-self) (*IQ84-3208*, 359). The anti-self could progressively get more power and influence over our mindfulness. It could also suddenly awaken, as if there would have never been any preliminary steps. In both cases, the anti-self is preparing the way it will be substituted to the present self. Others are often more aware of the powerful influence of my anti-self over my present self. I am unveiling my self in front of others as well as for my self-perception and self-understanding. Others are an integral part of my self. However, others cannot know my whole self (*IQ84-3126*). My new self that has replaced my previous self could question my own personality, or who-I-am-becoming, or who-I-am-here-and-now. I could believe that my new self is more appropriate to who-I-am, that is, to who-I-want-to-become. I could also be quite unsatisfied with my new self. A new anti-self is then born in my mind.

Interpretations that are covering facts are more necessary than facts themselves. Things (such as love) are simple. But when we become aware of their place in the Whole, then reality becomes much more complex (*L'herbe rouge* 67, 115). Human being perceives reality, whether it is the self, the world, Nature, or God. Such perceptions give birth to interpretations. And interpretations are basically influenced/distorted by our life experiences. We are always interpreting reality. Reality cannot be grasped as-it-is. It must always be reinterpreted. What does it mean to truly exist? Facts are uncertain. In a Nietzschean way (Nietzsche 1967 267, 301), Murakami asserted that everything that is perceived is an interpretation (*IQ84-191*, 262). There is no meaning of life without a basic feeling of really living/existing in front of myself/others, since I am being-alone and being-with-others. We should always look at reality as-it-is, but such an overview is impossible, at least for human beings. We could want to accept all components of reality. But we cannot define such components. We could only accept what we see (or what we decide to see). It is an illusion to believe that we could grasp reality as-it-is. It is also an illusion to believe that we could escape reality. Things, beings, and phenomena are not what we believe they are. However, reality is not the only truth. Insofar as Truth-itself would be mirrored by reality (as-it-is), we could understand that Truth-itself cannot be grasped. However, believing that Truth-itself is reality as-it-is implies an a priori belief: reality is conveying Truth. Such belief has to be proved. Otherwise, it is meaningless to assert that Truth-itself is reality as-it-is. Vian and Murakami have not identified any philosophical argument that could prove such assertion. They both focused on truth claims, and thus embracing a Nietzschean perspective (Truth-itself

does not exist). Truth claims can be found out in reality as well as in the unreal/illusory. What is important is the reality I am choosing, and not the whole reality (as-it-is) that I cannot grasp and understand. However, what is the true reality (IQ84-2 86 ; IQ84-3212) ? We only perceive part of reality. The whole reality cannot be grasped by human mind. Thus, we cannot know what is real or unreal/illusory. There is a gap between the reality and what I believe to be real (IQ84-1264 ; IQ84-2520 ; IQ84-351, 134, 160, 209, 328). There are various (possible) realities. There is basic link between my self and the reality I have chosen to observe/see. There is an interconnectedness between all existing things and beings. Is there any reality behind the (empirical) fact (IQ84-3406) ? Human existence is full of uncertainties, enigmas, mistakes, and contradictions (IQ84-284, 94 ; IQ84-3137). Why are given facts interpreted as mirroring the whole reality ? Indeed, given facts are considered as dimensions of reality, because of past perceptions and interpretations (which are grounded on older perceptions and interpretations, and so forth). The feeling/consciousness of one's existence comes from such interconnectedness between our past and present perceptions and interpretations. According to Vian and Murakami, the basis of human existence remains unknown. However, there are three sets of existential categories that reflect the sameness of existing : freedom and existential suffering ; temporality, having-to-die, and existential anxiety ; existential hope and despair.

Human being always wants to be free, since he/she is being-free. Being-free is following its own will and thus its desires. Does it change anything to satisfy our desires, asked Vian (*L'herbe rouge* 44) ? Human being cannot be free of desires. If it would be the case, human beings would not be living beings since they should not have any inner past. Having desires implies that we are being-free. Vian clearly perceived that the will of erasing desires from human heart/spirit is itself a desire. The will is always connected to desires. Being-free implies to have desires which arise from our selves. Our consciousness is free insofar as it is impregnated with desires. According to Vian, human freedom would be meaningless if human beings would be reborn from one life to another, as if there would be an eternal return of sameness. Vian strongly criticized the main Sartrean existentialist principle (existence precedes essence) (Pierrot, 2009, 252). Life is then harmful and disgraceful. Suffering is useless. It does not provide any right to anything. We could then understand why Vian asserted that we should hate anything that is useless (*L'herbe rouge* 141).

According to Murakami, freedom is always limited by fate (IQ84-2383). This is the existential power of fate. Fate makes our will-to-be-free basic delusion (IQ84-1339). Providing given meaning to things, phenomena and events, or claiming that everything is meaningless is nothing but free (personal) decisions. However, human freedom is always limited. The absolute will-to-be-free is an illusion. People love to be limited by taboos and prohibitions (325), although taboos and prohibitions are limiting the way they try to satisfy their desires. People are aware that taboos and prohibitions are socially constructed and that their being-with-others cannot avoid such compromise. Motivation is the basis of all desires. Most of our choices are meaningless, that is,

without any inherent meaning (IQ84-3285, 396). Life has no inherent meaning. We do not know why we are living. We have to decide if given things, phenomena, and events actually have an effective meaning (or to face the meaningless realities). Sometimes, the meaning is spontaneously arising. Murakami rather believed that existential suffering could be useful : our suffering makes us open to understand others' suffering. Empathy implies that we perceive others' suffering as if it would be our own pain. Compassion rather implies to suffer, when being in front of suffering beings. Compassionate beings are being-with-suffering-beings. Empathy has a basic cognitive dimension, while compassion has an emotional one. Human relationships are based on mutual understanding, respect, empathy, and compassion. Sometimes, our own being and existence could make others suffering. When we make others suffering, we are creating part of our own pain. I am being-with-others, so that my suffering and others' pain are interconnected. But the most important challenge is to find out a given meaning for our existential suffering, since only meaningful suffering could be tolerated, said Murakami (IQ84-2 241). My existential suffering will be interpreted in the context of my being-alone and being-with-others.

Existence is transitoriness. Then, past, present and future are nothing but inner stasis of temporality. Time is not a compartmentalized reality, said Vian (*L'herbe rouge* 105-107). What is self-evident in the way we spend our time is that we are obscuring our temporality, because we do not like to highlight our having-to-die. According to Vian, the world is nothing but prison for our body and spirit. Our existential situation (in-the-worldliness) implies a clear awareness of existential conditioning factors, including the awareness of our desires. Moreover, my world could coexist with others' world. However, both worlds cannot meet : they are parallel lines. Existential anxiety cannot be isolated from the awareness of such parallel worlds. Losing people we love is not only sad, it creates deep hole, an emptiness within our heart. Being in time means that we have-to-die. Human life is impregnated with the awareness of our having-to-die. Such awareness cannot get rid of sadness. Although we know that people have-to-die, we wish that people we love be immortal. If they would be immortal, then our own being would be released from its having-to-die. We want to forget our having-to-die in order to erase our existential anxiety. But it is useless (and meaningless) to do so. In making people we love immortal, we attempt to make our having-to-die disappearing from our life. We consciously know that we have-to-die. But such thought cannot be tolerated. That's why we unconsciously try to make our relatives and friends immortal. Such attempt is always contradicted by facts : people we love are still dying. Human life as the awareness of our having-to-die is thus tragic.

According to Murakami, everything is transitory. Everything is perishable, since it has a form. What is formless is then eternal. Human beings spent their time in perishable things. Time is the framework of perishable things, beings, and phenomena. Only human beings have the notion of time flow and could lose it (IQ84-1149, 207, 350, 382 ; IQ84-358, 254). Time is purely subjective, said Vian, in a Kierkegaardian way (Kierkegaard 1974a,66). Time is purely subjective. Is time flow unchanging and ordered ? Murakami

said that the unvarying and ordered character of time flow is nothing but social construction. Time flow could lose its consistency (IQ84-1 475-476 ; IQ84-2 318 ; IQ84-358, 252). The notion of temporality is described as being closely linked to a sense of loss (Gabriel 2002, 152). According to Murakami, my present self is rooted in the instant, in the eternal now. What is decisive for my self is my now. Murakami referred to Bergson (1999, 81-96) : our perception is nothing but memory ; we only perceive past phenomena. We cannot find out our original past (IQ84-3317). Existential anxiety is the awareness of our existential finitude, whose main expression is our having-to-die. Existential anxiety is a fear which is not conveyed by any precise object. The unavoidable death is within my self, as a having-to-die. Existential anxiety implies that I do not know where is my existential "locus". According to Murakami, existential anxiety is particularly arising when we feel that everything is meaningless (IQ84-3341). The lack of inherent meaning to any thing, phenomenon, and event is the origin of existential anxiety. In order to face meaningless reality, we must take existential anxiety upon ourselves (Tillich 1981, 129-132). I am responsible for what the world is becoming. Throughout my choices, I am building up the world I would like to live in (Sartre 1980, 612-615). Our responsibility is widened by the scope of our knowledge (IQ84-326, 423). The world is an infinite set of possibilities. The world varies from an interpretation to another. Out of our rememberings (and thus out of past interpretations), we are building up our own world. My thoughts, words, and actions tend to build up the world I wish to live in. Thus, I have deep responsibility for what the world is now becoming. My responsibility-for-others is basically to my being-with-others, and thus to my ability for love. Without love, the world would not exist. Love could distort our perception of the world, since love is irrational. But as said Henry James (1996, 20), love is the only thing we could deeply know. Love makes our existential anxiety more tolerable. Love makes us interpreting the past, the present, and the future in a different perspective. The present is moulded by past events and interpretations. The world cannot exist without me. Love makes us aware that we are an integral part of the world (IQ84-133, 532). The world is an integral part of my self. Murakami thus adopted an Heideggerian view on being-self-in-the-world (Heidegger 1962, 169). Love is in the midst of the self. Love could be helpful, when people have to face death. However, death is a phenomenon we cannot know. My being-free is always free to give/not-give a meaning to things, persons, events, relationships, and phenomena (IQ84-2 116, 121, 304). Love could rebuild the world, so that everything would be possible. But death is the unavoidable event that basically determine the way I will give/not give precise meaning to reality. Death is an integral part of human existence. It is already there when we are born : it is a potentiality-to-die. Death is one of the various components of human existence. Death makes us seriously thinking about the meaning of our life. If death would not exist, then we would not have to use our reason. Human being is a rationale animal, because he/she has to die and is aware of such having-to-die.

Hope is an issue of belief (*L'herbe rouge* 59). However, it is better to be sad than to hope in something vague/uncertain (32). Despair makes us seeing the foundations of

our self. According to Vian, despair could have two basic sources : (1) we already own all we could wish (the emptiness of the superfluous) ; (2) we do not have anything we wish (the emptiness of the lack). In both cases, we are unaware of our inner emptiness. Despair is an existential potentiality-to-be. It is based on the anxiety to be imprisoned in our past. Memory destroys our rememberings in order to make our self avoiding despair (108-113). The notion of God is useful for people who fear despair and death. But it is useless for those who fear to live with others, said Vian (*L'herbe rouge* 158). Indeed, there are no sound argument about God's existence/non-existence, since faith/unfaith is only an issue of belief (98). Mysteries are nothing but truth claims. Replacing mystery by words (or trying to explain it) is adding a second mystery to the first one. The third mystery would be created by magical beliefs that follow from words themselves (88). Hope and despair are two possible modes of being in a meaningless reality. In both cases, we have decided what it means to exist as well as our existential position in-face-of-the-Infinite. Theologically speaking, God is useless, even for believers : if God would be useful, then God would be a thing/object besides other things/objects. God is nonexistent, since God is not subjected to existential categories (suffering and death, fault and guilt, hope and despair). God is not a Supreme Being since then God would be a being besides other beings. In order to be God, God must be useless/nonexistent and must not have any being since God is nothing but the ground of being/existence (Pseudo-Denys the Aeropagite ; Master Eckhart). But believers usually want to have personal God, Impersonal God (God as the ground of being/existence) criticizes any notion of God that could be the delight of the superfluous. Vian strongly criticized the "bourgeois" God, that is, the God who seems to be exclusively own by the wealthiest. According to Vian, we should not be concerned with the happiness of humankind since we cannot make it arising in the daily life. Rather, we should focus on others' happiness. Then, believing or not in God is irrelevant. What is crucial is the decision to focus on others' happiness, without neglecting our own search for happiness. As being-alone and being-with-others, I must pursue both my own happiness and others' happiness.

Hope can only arouse frustration and deception. Despair is an existential potentiality of human heart. That's why we could identify an energy of despair, and thus the courage to take our despair upon ourselves. Hope implies that there are obstacles to the calmness of mind. We cannot live without hope, said Murakami. Murakami embraced a quite different perspective about gods. God is formless : that's why God could take various existential forms. Murakami was deeply aware that faith could give birth to intolerance (IQ84-3 83, 182, 243). Everything that could give us some hope (and make us escaping potentialities of despair) should be emphasized. Human existence mirrors shadows of hope and despair. Gods exist in human consciousness. The belief (in God) makes God existing. The unbelief makes God nonexistent. Any understanding is made of our misunderstandings, since there is an unknown dimension behind every thing, person, or phenomenon. We only believe what we want to believe. Religions and spiritualities are grounded on the human need to find out a meaning of life. Religious/spiritual doctrines have elaborated beautiful and attractive answers to existential

questioning. However, they have never provided any reliable truth (*IQ84*-2248-250). Truth-itself does not exist. Only truth claims are arising in human mind.

On one hand, Vian and Murakami have divergent opinions about the way some components of human existence should be interpreted. Murakami was influenced by Heidegger's existential philosophy (being-self-in-the-world, potentiality-for-Being). While Vian perceived that suffering is useless, Murakami said that suffering could help us to better understand others' life. On the other hand, Vian and Murakami shared a similar approach of the sameness of existing. Good/evil as well as the self are considered as unknowable realities. Even the basis of existence remains unknown : we cannot identify any inherent meaning to existential suffering, freedom, temporality, anxiety and having-to-die, hope and despair. Each of these phenomena is an integral part of human existence. In all cases, we can never find out any unchanging meaning. There is no Truth-itself, but only truth claims. In various ways, Vian and Murakami acknowledged the subjectivity of both the self and time (Kierkegaard). There is no thing-ness ; everything is an interpretation (Nietzsche). Uncertainties are integral parts of human existence. That's why doubt (and thus the possibility of despair) is existentially rooted. The works of Vian and Murakami converge, as they are expressing the unknowable character and the sameness of existing. Vian and Murakami interpreted reality as meaningless, that is, without any inherent meaning. A meaningless reality does not exclude hope. Rather, it makes hope arousing. Vian and Murakami claimed that hope and despair are potentialities-of-being in an meaningless reality. Hope and despair are different ways to look at existential loneliness and anxiety, freedom and temporality, suffering and having-to-die.

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From Spiritual Comfort to Spiritual Combat: Ezeulu in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* and Pranesharcharya in Anantha Murthy's *Samskara**

OSAYIMWENSE OSA

Introduction

Removed from teaching to focus on study and research in the second part of the summer 2013 by the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities (VHF) in its Residential Fellowship program, I had the opportunity to devote my time and energy to study and research in internationalization and teaching of World literature in colleges and universities. As people engaged in world literature, students and faculty should be able to appreciate its relevance and its potential to develop more broadminded critical thinking world citizens. Internationalization and teaching of World Literature could be guided by two concerns: (1) the sole concentration on western literature in a World Literature course stifles true appreciation of literature as a central discipline in the humanities; (2) the frustration of faculty who want to integrate other cultures' literatures into the course weakens significant exploration and teaching of Introduction to World Literature as it should be meaningfully taught.

Raising students' awareness of differences and sameness among cultures cannot be left to chance. It is in world literature that students' awareness of differences and sameness can easily be raised through exposure to significant literary works or masterpieces from various world cultures. I notice that the current Introduction to World Literature here in many colleges is essentially a survey of western literature from Early times through the Renaissance, and from the Renaissance to the Present. There is no meaningful integration of other cultures' literatures in it.

If world literature is to continue to be an exciting core of the humanities, it cannot afford to remain parochial. It is incumbent on its proponents to develop studies in the field in an international or multicultural manner embracing the rich and diverse cultures of the world to present what it means to live in a true multicultural global community. No other field is able to examine cultural mechanisms, manipulations, and processes in quite the same way as has literature. As a central discipline in the humanities, literature has a centripetal force that brings various strands of many disciplines into discussion.

This is why its position in the college curriculum for all students cannot be questioned. Literature is an indispensable learning and pedagogical tool in any of the humanities disciplines or social sciences. In a world decimated by violence, literature which provides vicarious experience is quite a positive force that promises to broaden people's awareness of others and their values. Such an awareness usually helps college students to appreciate and respect cultural diversity in a world that is increasingly growing multicultural in population. Internationalized literature can help students gain an understanding of other cultures and learn to appreciate the effects of social issues and forces that impact and shape the lives of others.

Since about the mid-1990s, the notion of world literature has emerged as the most promising rubric for imagining a major paradigm shift in the study and teaching of literature and for thinking beyond the dead ends of traditional comparative study. Porter (2011) argues that world literature, most broadly can refer to the universe of all written works in any language from any period. A significantly more manageable subset can be achieved by applying an evaluative filter to select the most significant masterpieces from a variety of traditions, giving us a world literature that resembles a globalized version of a great-books collection. Frankly, "world literature is not (and should not be) an infinite ungraspable canon of works but rather a mode of circulation and of reading."¹

The focus of this essay is on two major masterpieces by an African writer and by an Indian writer—Chinua Achebe (1930-2013) and U.R. Anantha Murthy (1932 -) from two different and far-flung traditions – Africa and the Indian subcontinent. It is interesting to note that they were born in the early 30s – Achebe in 1930 and Murthy in 1932, and their masterpieces were published almost at the same time in the 1960s.

In 1964 and in 1965, Chinua Achebe and A. R. Anantha Murthy published respectively, *Arrow of God* and *Samskara* — two great works which now have a significant place in the corpus of world literature. *Arrow of God* was first published in English but *Samskara* was first published in Kannda, an Indian language that has a literary history of more than a thousand years in South India — the official and administrative **language** of the state of **Karnataka**. Eleven years later, *Samskara* was translated into English by A.K. Ramanujan, and published by Oxford University Press in 1976.

One might wonder about how, what, and why this kind of pairing by me. It does need a brief explanation. I have taught *Arrow of God* a number of times to both undergraduate and graduate students in various colleges and universities as a professor. I did not by chance stumble on *Samskara*. I got my first exposure to it in the early 1990s while I was taking part in a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) sponsored program of expanding World Literature offering in the English Department at Clark Atlanta University in Atlanta, Georgia. It was in the Indian component of the program that I along with the other participants got our first exposure to *Samskara*. The discussion of this novel was led by Vinay Dhawadker who was fresh and energetic from the University of Chicago. I still consider *Samskara* as the best selection on that list of literary works which stimulated literary discussion and anthropological and religion

discussion as well. *Samskara* is now one of the novels along with *Lord Jim*, *Lord of the Flies*, and *Things fall apart* that I am likely to be found reading again and again because of the unquenchable interest I have in each of them. On all counts, *Samskara*, Anantha Murthy's first novel is not only a classic of Indian literature but a classic of world literature.

Alone as a novel, *Samskara* in its sophistication and artistry demolishes the thinking inherent in this part of Thomas Babington Macauley's "Minute on Indian Education" (1835): I have no knowledge of either Sanscrit or Arabic. But I have done what I could to form a correct estimate of their value. I have read translations of the most celebrated Arabic and Sanscrit works. I have conversed, both here and at home, with men distinguished by their proficiency in the Eastern tongues. I am quite ready to take the oriental learning at the valuation of the orientalists themselves. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. The intrinsic superiority of the Western literature is indeed fully admitted by those members of the committee who support the oriental plan of education. Thomas Babington Macauley (1800-1859), the historian, essayist, and parliamentarian, served as a member of the supreme council of the East India Company from 1834 to 1838, where he oversaw major educational and legal reforms. The "Minute" was written as a rebuttal to those council members who believed that Indian students should continue to be educated in Sanskrit and Arabic as well as English; Macauley's party carried the argument (www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/victorian/topic_4/macaulay.htm). Is this not an excellent example of the politics of education? Of course, that was then. But even now, there are still aspects of this kind of situation in education and in the real world. In part, perhaps Anantha Murthy published *Samskara* in Indian indigenous Kanada language as a rebuttal to Macauley's "a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia" and his notion of "intrinsic superiority" of western Literature. In the light of current world enlightenment, globalization, multiculturalism and increasing ease and sophistication in communication in the world, literary masterpieces from every culture of the world should be accessible to every reader or scholar or researcher. It is truly, "reading our way to a better world" (Spencer, 2013).

Until *Samskara* was published in English in 1976, its accessibility was limited albeit to those who read and understand Kanada language—thousands or millions of people. For a broader or more international readership any literary piece should of necessity be translated into various languages. Translation cannot be ignored in a truly effective study and teaching of world literature. Translation plays an important role in bridging the gaps between the different cultures and nations. Literary translations in particular help these different nations reach a universal culture on a common ground. A good translation is not simply concerned with transferring the propositional content of the source language text (SLT), but also its other pragmatic features (Hassan 2011). In an early critical essay in 1971, S. Nagarajan indicated that as far as he knew then, the novel *Samskara* (Manohara Grantha Mala Dhawar) had not been translated into English,

and added at that time, "indeed it is not easy to translate it either, since its structure and style have something of the complexity and density of an English 'metaphysical' lyric. (The only person who can perhaps successfully attempt the task is A.K. Ramanujan). Perhaps that implicit faith and trust of Nagarajan incited A.K. Ramanujan to embark on that gigantic task of meticulous translation, and five years later in 1976, he successfully produced the English translation which the international community now has access to. Evidently, Nagarajan was able to publish his incisive critical essay on the novel in *Indian Writing Today* because he had a thorough command of Kanada language which many a scholar did not and still do not have.¹ For a novel in an Indian "vernacular" to attract such a world-wide attention is a rare phenomenon indeed. One can easily dismiss this as stemming from an anthropological stake that the western world has in things eastern. But the fact is that *Samskara* is a great work of fiction in the literature of its birth, and if it has become world-famous, this only proves its merit (Tirumalesh, 2009).

Our reading and discussion of this novel at the seminar in Atlanta, Georgia, was always recalling for me *Arrow of God*. The local and rural Durvasapura in *Samskara* recalls the local and rural Umuaro in *Arrow of God*. The spiritual leader, Praneshacharya, and his predicament, recalls the Chief Priest, Ezeulu, and his predicament in *Arrow of God*. Certainly, without Praneshacharya there is no *Samskara* and without Ezeulu there is no *Arrow of God*.

Umuaro and Durvasapura

Both novels are set in rural communities undergoing changes. The fictionalized rural setting in *Samskara* is Durvasapura, a community (agrahara) of conservative Madhava Brahmins, and the fictionalized rural setting of *Arrow of God* is Umuaro, a union of six villages created to ward off attacks by a hostile neighbor, the Abam. This union created Ulu as their traditional god and made Ezeulu as its chief priest. In *Samskara* and *Arrow of God* Durvasapura and Umuaro offer excellent settings for the actions of Praneshacharya and Ezeulu respectively because they are the kind of places where traditions and orthodoxy in matters of religion can still be strong even in the face of looming changes. In the twentieth century with the rise of non-Brahman movements, especially in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra, they (the once powerful Brahmins) have finally seen the eclipse of their prestige. Few Brahmins today pursue their traditional occupation as priests. Their power has all but vanished. In village India today they live a hand-to-mouth existence. (Parthasarathy, 190). *Samskara* is not so much concerned with the Durvasapura Brahmin society as with Praneshacharya himself. Similarly, *Arrow of God* is not all that concerned with Umuaro community as with Ezeulu himself. The job of this essay is to compare and contrast these two spiritual gurus from their superficially comfortable spiritual leadership state through their state of combat and confusion as leaders of their communities.

Praneshacharya and Ezeulu

Early in the novel, Praneshacharya appears comfortable in his reputation and in his role as the spiritual leader of the Durvasapura agrahara. He deliberately married an invalid wife, "a dried-up wasted pea-pod." at the age of 16, and for over two decades,

he does not complain about any emotional or conjugal starvation but instead gladly takes care of her in the belief that he was going into paradise. His heart overflows with gratitude for his bed-ridden wife who, by becoming an invalid, has obliged him with the opportunity of becoming more perfect and more mellow on the road to salvation and he constantly rejoices in his fate (Nagarajan, 117). I wonder why Nagarajan indicated “by becoming an invalid.” Did his wife choose to become an invalid?

Besides his taking care of his sickly wife, Praneshacharya regularly recites the Vedic puranas and scriptures and sacred Hindu legends to the other Brahmins who have a high regard for him as the “Crest Jewel of Vedic Learning,” an honorific appellation that befits only a few studious holy men. According to the author, Praneshacharya’s presence in Durvasapura adds prestige to their agrahara making other agraharas respect Durvasapura. But only one fallen Brahmin, Narranapa, has no regard for him or for orthodox Brahminism.

On one visit to Narranapa, Praneshacharya is told defiantly by Narranapa, the reprobate Brahmin: “Your texts and rites don’t work any more. The Congress party is coming to power, you’ll have to open up the temples to all outcastes (p.21). In *Arrow of God*, beside traditional African religion and socio-political and cultural life, a new religion, Christianity, and a new and foreign administration, British colonial administration, have been established. Arguably, it is no longer at ease in Umuaro. The old dispensation of traditional African religion and belief is not as strong as it used to be. Traditional religion and traditional authorities are being challenged. In such sociopolitical situation, does Ezeulu’s ruminating over his power as Chief priest of Ulu early in the novel come as a surprise? “Whenever Ezeulu considered the immensity of his power over the year and the crops and, therefore, over the people he wondered if it was real. It was true he named the day for the feast of the Pumpkin Leaves and for the New Yam feast; but he did not choose it...His power was no more than the power of a child over a goat that was said to be his...What kind of power was it if it would never be used? Better to say it was not there, that it was no more than the power in the anus of the proud dog who sought to put out a furnace with his puny fart...(p. 3. p.4).

Like Durvasapura in the twentieth century in *Samskara*, Umuaro society in *Arrow of God* is in flux particularly in terms of historical and political changes. Although Achebe never admitted it publicly, the single most important source—in fact, the only source—for *Arrow of God* is a tiny socio-historical pamphlet published without copyright by a retired corporal of the Nigeria Police Force. His name was (he died in 1972) Simon Alagbogu Nnolim, and the title of his pamphlet was *The History of Umuchu*, published by Eastern Press Syndicate, Depot Road, Enugu, Nigeria in 1953. On all counts then, though fiction, *Arrow of God* like *Samskara* is strongly rooted in real solid history.

But one should note however that the collapsing of boundaries between the pure and impure is more easily accomplished in the fictional world than in the real. Tradition cannot be given up overnight, however desirable this may be. In traditional societies like India, the stroke of a pen, whether the writer’s or the legislator’s, accomplishes little. Caste is a fact of existence in secular India, and untouchability, though illegal, has

not entirely disappeared in spite of Gandhi’s Himalayan efforts to clean the brahmanical cowsheds (Parthasarathy, p.194).

In *Arrow of God*, British colonialism was already a fact and was getting more entrenched with covert and overt onslaught on the customs and traditional practices of the Umuaro people. The system of Indirect rule—ruling the locals through a chief, traditional leader or head—was the British style of administration in many of their colonial territories in West Africa. This is what Captain Winterbottom, the British colonial District Commissioner, wants to do with Ezeulu—to turn a traditional African chief priest into a chief servant or warrant officer for British colonial administration in a part of Africa where they “abominated kings.”²² Ezeulu rejects Captain Winterbottom’s offer of this warrant chief position because he believes firmly that his primary loyalty as Chief Priest is to Ulu, the traditional god of his Umuaro people and not any other authority. For his rejection of the position offered and for his arrogance, he is jailed for two months. While in jail, he misses his traditional ritual eating of one sacred roasted yam to signify the passing of a month in their agrarian calendar. Umuaro people interpret Ezeulu’s sending one of his sons, Oduche, to the new Christian religion as his friendship with the British colonial administrator, Captain Winterbottom, but Ezeulu’s main reason for sending his son is to have his eye and ear there getting any information on them through his son. He rigidly considers himself first and foremost, the Chief Priest of Ulu and the proud traditional head of the Umuaro people.

Ezeulu and Praneshacharya

The traditional spiritual leaders, Praneshacharya and Ezeulu, feel dutybound to honor, respect and abide by the dictates and directives of their gods even in the face of crisis. Each novel opens with a description of the seriousness and integrity with which each spiritual leader or chief priest performs his role and duty. *Arrow of God* opens with Ezeulu in his third day of gazing or watching intently for signs of the new moon because he should not make any mistake in the calendar of events in Umuaro.

Ezeulu is quite intelligent and wants to move with the changing sociocultural and political climate of Umuaro. This is why he sends his son to the Christian mission to be his “eye” there. Versed in the indigenous lore of his people, he recalls what his father told him about the true owner of the land that Umuaro and Okperi fought over. A man of integrity, Ezeulu is the only one who took side against his Umuaro people in their war with Okperi because according to him, “Umuaro does not fight a war of blame.” It is this singular act of courage, fearlessness, and integrity that endeared him to the British colonial administrator, Captain Winterbottom. This is why Winterbottom also considers him for the position of a paramount chief working for the colonial administration. But his own people do not absolutely approve of his friendship with Winterbottom, and the leader of this opposition is Nwaka, a chief priest of another lesser god in Umuaro, Idemili.

Like Ezeulu the intelligent priest, Praneshacharya is the learned Brahmin who has a prestigious and honorific title, “Crest Jewel of Vedic Learning.” For a thorough appreciation of the significance of Praneshacharya, let’s look at the position of the

traditional Brahmin in Indian culture: The Brahmin is the keeper of the sacred traditions, the Vedas, which he has for two thousand years preserved, interpreted, and transmitted. His other occupation is the performance of sacrificial rituals. As makers of the Hindu tradition, Brahmans had enormous prestige. Indian civilization is unthinkable without their extraordinary presence.” Such is Praneshacharya in *Samskara*. However, as Satish C. Aikant (2011) rightly asserts, Praneshacharya’s brahminism extends beyond the normal parameters and his self enforced celibacy is a manifestation of his excessive zeal for purity. He studied in Benares Kashi the center of Hindu studies. He is seen at the beginning of the novel with a good degree of extraordinary comfort and dedication, in rendering service to his invalid and sick wife, Bhagirathi. According to the author, Praneshacharya has been doing this routine for 20 years. He does this for a reason and also based on solid belief: He believes that the merciful Lord has put him to this way of life to test him. His heart overflows with gratitude for his bed-ridden wife who, by becoming an invalid, has obliged him with the opportunity of becoming more perfect and more mellow on the road to salvation and he constantly rejoices in his fate (Nagarajan, 117)

Moment of decision

At the heart of the dilemma in each of the two novels is a significant decision to be taken by the spiritual leaders in their respective communities under certain special circumstances. In *Samskara*, Praneshacharya has to decide on whether it is proper cremate the dead body of a fallen Brahmin without polluting themselves or polluting the whole agrahara. He searches the Vedic scriptures and goes to the Maruti temple god for an answer but gets none. In *Arrow of God*, Ezeulu is faced with taking an important decision about ritually eating two roasted yams to signify the passing of two months – a passage of time necessary for Umuaro people to harvest their yams which were in danger of getting rotting in the ground. Like Praneshacharya, he also goes to his god, Ulu, for direction and answer to the dilemma but he gets none.

Ezeulu’s visit to the shrine of Ulu and Praneshacharya’s visit to the temple of Hanuman the monkey god

As chief priest or spiritual leader, Praneshacharya and Ezeulu were quite comfortable and apt in discharging their duties to the point of becoming too idealistic. But underneath this façade of idealism is a human weakness. Both Ezeulu’s visit to Ulu and Praneshacharya’s visit to Hanuman, the monkey god, are predicated on a search for an answer to a predicament in their communities—predicaments that are really not insurmountable. While that of Praneshacharya looks somewhat genuine, that of Ezeulu is not. Ezeulu’s motives are not entirely honest. He is not happy about his people except his friend Akuebue not visiting him in jail and he intends to “hit Umuaro hard” with his refusal to eat the sacred yam and accelerate the calendar for the village to harvest their yams. It is a disrespect and an insult to ignore a genuine appeal from respectable people as regard any serious situation that is not insurmountable. By selfishly bringing his own personal grievance to bear on a precarious communal situation—the chance or possibility of a no harvest at all with attendant possibility of famine in Umuaro—Ezeulu

directs attention to his intransigence and thoughtlessness. Ezeulu is told by his people that they will take responsibility for breaking religious custom by harvesting their yam crops of yam... The paradox in Ezeulu’s actions is that he can be fully flexible in accommodating himself to the will of the white government, but wholly inflexible (and not typical of Igbo attitudes and actions in general) in adjusting to the realities of the villagers’ need (Killam, 2004). Immensely proud, Ezeulu’s image of himself is enshrined almost in hubris. According to him: “I can see tomorrow... I have passed the stage of dancing to receive presents.” It is this kind of self image that makes him blind to reality in Umuaro and makes him ignore both elders and common people in Umuaro.

When in desperation, ten Umuaro community leaders—“men of high title”—call on him in a grand special way picking their words with care through their spokesman, Ezeulu should have accommodated them and listened to them. Their visit and interaction with Ezeulu is pivotal and significant enough to warrant quoting some significant excerpts from the novel:

“Perhaps you can guess why we have come. It is because of certain stories that have reached our ears; and we thought the best thing was to find out what is true and what is not from the only man who can tell us. The story we have heard is that there is a little disagreement about the next New Yam Festival. As I said we do not know if it is true or not but we do know that there is fear and anxiety in Umuaro which if allowed to spread might spoil something. We cannot wait for that to happen; an adult does not sit and watch while the she-goat suffers the pain of childbirth tied to a post. Leaders of Umuaro, have I spoken according to your wish?” (p.206)

“We are Umuaro. Therefore listen to what I am going to say. Umuaro is now asking you to go and eat those yams today and name the day of the next harvest... I said go and eat those yams *today, not tomorrow*; and if Ulu says we have committed an abomination let it be on the heads of the ten of us here. You will be free because we have set you to it. ... (p.208)

The Umuaro leaders exhaust all their appeal and persuasion skills to make Ezeulu eat the remaining yam to the point of offering themselves to absolve whatever arises from his consumption of the sacred yam. But he refuses defending himself that the sacred yams are not ordinary yams for eating. He only promises the Umuaro leaders to consult Ulu for a directive or answer; and the leaders’ duty now according to them is “to watch Ezeulu’s mouth for a message from Ulu.” Clearly, “whatever external forces are brought to bear upon his life are there only as objectifications of what actually goes on inside him” Mordaunt” (1989).

Ezeulu’s visit to Ulu’s shrine does not really come out of his mind but simply to satisfy the Umuaro leaders who called on him. With this kind of mindset, it is not surprising that his experience at the shrine smacks of a foreboding disaster: “As Ezeulu cast his string of cowries (for divination exercise) the bell of Oduche’s people (the new Christian religion) rings. For one brief moment he was distracted by its sad measured monotone and he thought how strange it was that it should sound so near —much

nearer than it did in his compound” (p.210). Arguably, the ringing of the Christian religion bell suggests vibrance and vitality to the umuaro community and even beyond while his own casting of his string of cowries yields no audible sound. If any, it does seem that the sound of the Christian bell silenced it. He comes out of Ulu’s shrine to announce that his consultation with the deity “had produced no result and that the six villages would be locked in the old year for two more moons.”

According to Achebe, perhaps Akuebe was the only man in Umuaro who knew that Ezeulu was not deliberately punishing the six villages that made up Umuaro. “He knew that the Chief priest was helpless; that a thing greater than *nte* had been caught in *nte*’s trap but “the trap” is not beyond fixing or repair. It is Akwebue that intimates him about the new religion taking advantage of Ezeulu’s refusal to eat the sacred yam, and promising the new religion’s immunity against any calamity—“offering sanctuary to those who wished to escape the vengeance of Ulu” (p.220). To avoid disaster and hunger, Umuaro people start harvesting their yams and presenting them to the new religion. A knowledge of this and his son’s failure to inform him about the new religion’s plan or move infuriate Ezeulu and he makes his son Oduche, a victim of displaced aggression: “I called you as a father calls his son and told you to go and be my eye and ear among those people...I sent you to see and hear for me. I did not know at that time that I was sending a goat’s skull...Go away and rejoice that your father cannot count on you...go away from here, lizard that ruined his mother’s funeral.” (p.221). Ezeulu’s young son, Oduche, is not old and mature enough to understand the ramification of his father’s refusal to eat the sacred yam that he missed while he was in the British colonial administration’s detention for bluntly rejecting the warrant chief position that was offered to him.

Ezeulu’s nightmarish dream seeing mourners singing and drumming seems to foreshadow the death of their traditional religion and the triumph of the new Christian religion. The sudden death of his son, Obika, compounds Ezeulu’s mental state and he lives out his last days as a demented priest. To the Umuaro people, the issue is simple: their god had taken sides with them against his headstrong and ambitious priest and thus upheld the wisdom of their ancestors—that no man however great was greater than his people; that no one ever won judgement against his clan (p.230).

Unlike Ezeulu who is appealed to and pressured to break custom considering the circumstances of harvest in Umuaro, Praneshacharya, the learned Crest Jewel of Vedic leaning, who has won all accolades for his brilliance, discipline, and integrity, is not pressured to go to the temple of his god. He does it out of his own volition. His experience however in the the monkey god Maruti’s temple is almost the same as Ezeulu’s experience in Ulu’s shrine—no result. It is the same loneliness, silence, and lack of response: Praneshacharya waited desperately for the god’s favour, His solution. “Without a proper rite, the dead body is rotting; O Maruti, how long is this ordeal going to last?”—he pleaded...the man-sized Monkey-god Maruti just stood still...(p.62)

Outside the temple, it is worse. The stench of Narranapa’s corpse is unsettling the neighborhood and vultures are everywhere picking the dead rats and of course waiting to feed on that of Narranapa if no cremation was done. The brahmins shout in unison to

scare the vultures away but fail. One of them, another Brahmin who according to the author “had just returned beaming, after filling his belly with *uppitu* (note that he was not supposed to eat anything before cremation of Narranapa’s body) “ suggests to them to bring out the sacred gongs and beat them to scare away the vultures. This worsens the situation and makes the agrahara looks more ridiculous. In the author, Anantha Murthy’s words, “The dreadful auspicious din, like the din during the great offerings of flaming camphor, shattered the grim silence of the afternoon like grisly wardrums. For anyone who heard it in the villages five or six miles around, it created the illusion that in Durvasapura it was worship time, that they were making an offering of flaming camphor in the temple and beating the huge temple drum” (60). But the reality is that death and stench dominate Durvasapura, and the vultures seem to triumph: Again and again the obstinate vultures came back and sat on the roofs. The brahmins came out again and again and beat their gongs, blew their conches. The battle was on till evening. But it was the brahmins who got exhausted (p.61). It is in this kind of bleak and depressing environment that Praneshacharya who is physically and spiritually weak easily falls victim to temptations of the flesh—sleeping with Chandri, a lower caste woman, and his transformation begins.

A life of asceticism and self denial gradually begins receding to the past and an integrated fuller life of spirituality and humanity gradually begins.

The novel does not really end. Will Praneshacharya change or modify his philosophy of life in light of his own experiences beginning with his intimate relation with Chandri? At least he strongly realizes the emptiness of the thought or fear of pollution through mere talking to a lower caste person like Chandri and realizes the fullness and bloom in a physical and arguably a spiritual union with a lower caste person like Chandri, and learns that Mahabala and Narranapa were not absolute demons after all. At the moment of his wife Bhagirathi’s death when she “let out a shriek that left him speechless,” it is Chandri of all people that he runs to albeit, Chandri has already decisively left their agrahara.

What is noteworthy and interesting is that Praneshacharya’s running to Narranapa’s house and calling out to Chandri soon after his invalid wife’s death is just like a reenactment or replay of what Chandri did earlier—running to him (Praneshacharya) when Narranapa died. But at that time Praneshacharya as an orthodox brahmin, did not want to talk to her primarily to avoid pollution. Praneshacharya now finds himself in the same situation. Wiser now he does not think about “pollution” looking for Chandri to talk to. Frankly, this is like running full circle. Praneshacharya’s psychological and spiritual combat with himself is crystallized in his statement, “All things indirect must become direct. Must pierce straight in the eye. But it’s agony either way. If I hide things, all through life I’ll be agonized by the fear of discovery, by some onlooking eye. If I don’t I’ll muddy the lives of others by opening up and exposing the truth to the very eyes my brahminhood has lived and grown by” (p.132).

“To read *Samskara* as a critique of orthodox Hinduism is to limit it severely for it is a novel that repudiates a decadent value system but more significantly redefines the

process of a collective code giving way to individual choice” by Praneshacharya (Aikant, 36). Like Samskara, *Arrow of God* is really about individual choice by Ezeulu.

In adhering too much to the letter of their religions instead of to the spirit, the chief priests, Praneshacharya and Ezeulu, demonstrate their limitations and their fallibility as leaders. In Anantha Murthy’s thinking, the full redemption of Pranshacharya is best left outside the scope of the novel, but in *Arrow of God*, Ezeulu ends up demented, in all probability, as the last chief priest of a dying independent traditional African god, Ulu—demonstrating the end of an era: So in the end only Umuaro and its leaders saw the final outcome. To them the issue was simple. Their god had taken sides with them against his headstrong and ambitious priest and thus upheld the wisdom of their ancestors—that no man however great was greater than his people; that no one ever won judgement against his clan(p.230).

Intense confusion in Praneshacharya and in Ezeulu

Like Macbeth who becomes a nervous wreck soon after realizing the enormity of his crime—murdering his royal guest, King Duncan in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*—Praneshacharya is a nervous wreck after he realizes what he has just done—committing adultery secretly, or engaging in a clandestine sexual intercourse with Naranapa’s wife, Chandri, a prostitute, and from a lower caste in the dark forest.

Evidently, his religious orthodoxy and ascetism was just a veneer that cracked easily with the touch of Chandri’s breast in a safe and lonely environment in the forest. He ruminates, “I was roused by the unexpected touch of her breasts, I ate the plantains she took out of the end of her sari” (p.97). Any wonder why Praneshacharya swiftly becomes a hedonist, at least, in his “one night stand” with the prostitute, Naranapa’s concubine in the dark forest? Used to dryness and lifelessness from his wife, “Bhagirathi’s body, a dried-up wasted pea-pod” he gets an electrifying charge of his sexuality and humanity which had all the while been dormant for 20 years with his Brahmin wife. He succumbs easily to the soft feminine touch of Chandri’s breast, and with simple feminine intuition as well as a prostitute’s skill, Chandri takes charge of the seduction and lovemaking: “As his hand played on her hair, *Chandri’s intensity doubled* (my emphasis). She held his hands tightly and stood up and she pressed them to her breasts now beating away like a pair of doves. Touching full breasts he had never touched, Praneshacharya felt faint. As in a dream, he pressed them. As the strength in his legs was ebbing, Chandri sat the Acharya, holding him close (p.63). As a special foreplay before sex, Chandri takes out her plantains, peels them and feeds them to him like a child before spreading her sari on the ground for sex. This scene of Praneshacharya’s sex with Chandri is like a fulfillment of what Naranapa, the hedonist and reprobate Brahmin, told or scoffed or vented on him earlier in the novel: ‘You read those lush sexy Puranas, but you preach a life of barrenness... Can I give you Brahmins a piece of advice... Push those sickly wives of yours into the river. Be like the sages of your holy legends—get hold of a fish-scented fisherwoman who can cook you fish-soup, and go to sleep in her arms. And if you don’t experience god when you wake up, my name isn’t Naranapa(25, 26). Praneshacharya eventually is fed peeled plantain and goes to sleep in Chandri’s arms in the forest. Is this a special prediction of what a

brahmin like Praneshacharya can do at an unguarded moment and under a conducive environment for romance or sex?

Praneshacharya is definitely not the like of Joseph who can tear himself from a woman, Portiphah’s wife, who freely offers herself to him to commit adultery or fornication but close to David who lusts after Uriah’s wife and eventually commits adultery with her in *The Bible*. He is perhaps not all that close to David. I wonder if he is close even to David who commits adultery after seeing or looking at a nude woman, Uriah’s wife taking her bath. Unlike David who saw Uriah’s wife in broad daylight Praneshacharya in the novel does not even see Chandri’s breast in the dark. “Even in broad daylight, it was shady and dusky there” (p.83). Only the physical touch was enough to arouse him, and very soon after, the whole experience disturbs him to the point where he rationalizes it but it is a futile rationalization:

“I was roused by the unexpected touch of her breasts... Hunger, weariness, and the disappointment that Lord Maruti gave no answer. That was the reason why ... That moment brought into being what never was and then itself went out of being. Formless before, formless after. In between, the embodiment, the moment. Which means I’m absolutely not responsible for making love to her. Not responsible for that moment. But the moment altered me—why?” Even after Naranapa’s death, he finds it difficult to forget him. As a matter of fact, has Praneshacharya not partaken of the same prostitute that Naranapa had as his wife? This realization makes him uneasy. It is like an epiphany. He cries or moans like a baby. This childhood image of innocence and guilt is the beginning of Praneshacharya’s real combat in realizing that he is not better than Naranapa after all. “At the touch of Chandri’s breast, the animal leaped to its natural self and bared its teeth. Naranapa’s words came to his mind” p.81).

Though a reprobate Brahmin, Naranapa does seem to be a transparent and honest confident character than Praneshacharya. He sees the brahmins and even Praneshacharya himself as frauds. His challenges are blunt. For example; “*let’s see who wins, Archarya. You or me.* Let’s see how long all this brahmin business will last. All your Brahmin respectability. I’ll roll it up and throw it all ways for a little bit of pleasure with one female (p.21; my emphasis). On another occasion—the last time really — when Praneshacharya confronts him after his sacrilegious act – taking Muslims early morning to their sacred site, Ganapati temple stream, and carrying away the sacred man-length fish, Naranapa challenges him again, “*Let’s see who wins in the end—you or me.* I’ll destroy brahminism. I certainly will. My only sorrow is that there’s no brahminism really left to destroy in this place—except you” (my emphasis, p.21). He accuses him of hypocrisy and asserts that he is honest: “You read those lush sexy Puranas, but you preach a life of barrenness. But my words, they say what they mean :If I say *sleep with a woman*, it means *sleep with a woman*; If I say eat fish, it means *eat fish*.(p.25). In the end who really wins? According to S. Nagarajan (1971), “Naranapa was no ordinary reprobate; his heterodoxy was planned and cultivated in deliberate opposition to Pranashacharya’s orthodoxy.”

Arguably, Narranapa, though dead was the winner. In life and in death, Narranapa wins. Praneshacharya becomes conscious of his wife's 'ugliness' and lifelessness only after sleeping with Chandri, his prostitute and concubine. In the light of Narranapa's confidence and relentless challenges to him, Praneshacharya is the weak and spineless loser. He lacks the assertiveness and confidence of Narranapa who did not hide his relationship with Chandri. Before the other brahmins, "he was afraid to say openly, to say explicitly, that he too had shared in Narranapa's pleasure" (p.77).

He now sees, on reflection and deep thinking, that Narranapa was not a complete and thoughtless reprobate Brahmin afterall. "Just like Narranapa who turned the agrahara upside down by fishing in the temple- tank, I too would have turned the Brahmin lives upside down. I'd be giving their faith a shattering blow. What shall I tell them? "I slept with Chandri. I felt disgust for my wife" (p.131) He agonizes mentally and spiritually about a decision to be free from spiritual fraud and bondage and secrecy publicly confessing his sin— his shortcoming and failure as a brahmin—sleeping with a lowcaste prostitute, Chandri, that lived with Narranapa of all people in the agrahara. Evidently, he is indecisive. He seems to literally take everything to God for direction. Praneshacharya now realizes that he lacks the decisive power of Narranapa and that of Mahabala: "O God take from me the burden of decision. Just as it happened in the dark of the jungle, without my will, may this decision too happen...Narranapa, did you go through this agony? Mahabala, did you go through it?" My question is, whose will was it – secretly enjoying sex he had denied himself for two decades? Chandri is even more decisive. After their secret love-making, she decisively cremates Narranapa's body with the help of some Muslims and she goes away to Kundappura but Praneshacharya is confused and combats too many things.

It is in part his indecisiveness that makes him go to hanuman the monkey god even for a common sense decision to cremate a dead body whose stench in the hot summer could endanger the life of the whole agrahara. In such a dire situation, Praneshacharya should have taken the decision to cremate but did nothing. He does not realize that literal interpretation ignores context. A decision to cremate in the context of the hot and humid summer would have been pardonable, and of course that is arguably the better decision. In his orthodoxy, he believes too much in the letter instead of the spirit of what his religion or brahminhood says. I am not sure that the world would have blamed him for his decision to cremate a fallen Brahmin—a cremation which Chandri eventually does with the help of Muslims.

Similarly, I am not sure the world would have blamed Ezeulu for deciding to ritually eat one sacred yam to mark the passing of another month when the whole agrarian community's yams were in danger of getting rotting underground (yam tubers grow big and ripe for harvesting in the ground/underground). This kind of decision could have saved the whole of Umuaro from a certain disaster and could have prevented the new Christian religion from taking advantage of the precarious situation in Umuaro. Too much emphasis on doctrines can degenerate into doctrines for doctrines sake and too much emphasis on law can degenerate into law for laws' sake. Where there is a human

need, should the doctrines and laws not bend? Frankly, the growing importance of religion places an onus on religious leaders (or spiritual leaders) to use the power at their command with as high a sense of responsibility as is humanly possible. They should preach tolerance between rival religious groups on one hand and between church and state on the other. Given the multifarious problems facing it, the last thing Africa (or the whole world) needs today or in the future is religious wars on the continent (or elsewhere in the world).⁴ But pockets of religious conflicts and wars and catastrophes emanating from doctrines for doctrines' sake are in various places in the world today.

All said, *Samskara* and *Arrow of God* are two good examples of what David Damrosch considers as "literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language." The success of this Indian novel and this African novel is due strongly to the fine artistic and credible psychological portrayal of these memorable characters, two religious or spiritual leaders from two different cultures—Ezeulu and Praneshacharya. Against a background of the dynamics and forces of religions from time immemorial through the present century—some pleasant and some horrible— a thoughtful reflection on these two characters and their activities is important in a true realization and understanding of what true religion, spirituality, and humanism should be.

Notes

1. Like many, I do not know a word of Kananda but I have been able to read and appreciate in English a good modicum of some aspects of Indian culture which hitherto was unknown. See detail of Erin Scumpf's stress on intermediality and translation in comparative and world literature in "Intermediality, Translation, Comparative and World Literature," *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 13. 3 <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1814>>
2. According to S. Nagarajan, the job he attempted in his article was to provide for non-Kanada readers like me some idea of the main theme and characters of the novel and its temper and tone. Arguably, he was a very early scholar and critic of note of what eventually was published in the English language as *Samskara*.
3. In the revised edition of *Arrow of God*, Chinua Achebe uses "where they abominated kings" to replace "where they had no kings before" in the original "unrevised" edition. Unlike some other African societies that had centralized authorities — the Obaship or monarchy in the ancient empire of Benin, or in Oyo empire or in the Sokoto caliphate — there was really no central authority among the Igbos that *Arrow of God* deals with. This was why British colonial system of indirect rule did not really succeed very well there.
4. See "Of transcendent controlling powers" *West Africa* No 3964 13-19 September 1993, p.1610. There are more thoughtful reflections on religion in Africa in this particular issue of *West Africa* whose cover is AFRICA: IN THE NAME OF GOD –THE POWER OF RELIGION.

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The Ambiguous Status of Commonwealth Literature: A Critical Consideration

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Introduction

A spectre is haunting literary studies: the spectre of «post/colonialism.» No self-respecting scholarly journal can survive without a regular dose of it. No decent academic institution can do without a specialist, or at least an amateur, in the field. But what is the beast that goes by the name of «post/colonial literature»? Is it merely ~Commonwealth Literature)) putting on another set of stripes, replacing those of former and now late popular disguises such as «New Literatures in English or «World Literature Written in English))? Or is there more to it than that? And why does the term cause such heated debate? (Theo **D'haen Leiden University, 11**)

Commonwealth Literature poses a headache not as to whether or not it exists, for volumes of credible artistic works, scholarly articles, and tested critical theories have been published under the nomenclature - 'Commonwealth Literature'. The debate has evolved even beyond Salman Rushdie's opinion that, "there is no such thing as 'Commonwealth Literature'" to trying to situate, define and delimit it amongst world literatures. When a phenomenon poses a problem of definition or identification, the temptation would be to conclude that it does not exist in the first place. This way of looking at things cannot be completely discarded or waved aside as unreasonable for there is some truth in it. Although this line of thought may not exactly be applicable to Commonwealth Literature, there is nevertheless the crisis of delimitation or identifying its borders. For instance, critics hardly find it easy to sort out the elements that constitute what they refer to as 'Commonwealth Literature' from those that make up Postcolonial Literature. It often poses a problem to define Commonwealth Literature because the body of works that are usually considered as belonging to this domain seems to overlap with what is professed to be Postcolonial Literature. Therefore, it is pretty difficult to clearly trace its boundaries and make a reliable distinction between the two terms. The temptation, therefore, is to use the two expressions as alternatives. These inseparable but distinct expressions are discussed in this discourse *pari parsu* for purposes of clarity, since they are like a pair of twins with the same umbilical cord, where an examination of one implies the other. In Henry Schwarz's opinion, it has become difficult, "to describe Postcolonial Studies than it was even five years ago" (1).

The adjective 'ambiguous' is formed from the term ambiguity, which I think merits an explanation in this context since it is central in our discussion and open to multiplicity of meanings. J. A. Cuddon in *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* makes reference to William Empson's document, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. He observes that "this term has had some weight and importance in critical evaluation" (30). In brief, "Empson's theory was that things are often not what they seem, that words connote at least as much as they denote - and very often more" (30). Empson explained thus: . We call it ambiguous . . . when we recognise that there could be a puzzle as to what the author meant, in that alternate views might be taken without sheer misreading. . . An ambiguity in ordinary speech, means something very pronounced, and as a rule witty or deceitful.' Empson distinguishes seven main types, which may be summarised as follows:

1. When a detail is effective in several ways simultaneously.
2. When two or more alternative meanings are resolved into one.
3. When two apparently unconnected meanings are given simultaneously.
4. When alternative meanings combine to make clear a complicated state of mind in the author.
5. A kind of confusion when a writer discovers his idea while actually writing. In other words, he has not apparently preconceived the idea but come upon it during the act of creation.
6. Where something appears to contain a contradiction and the reader has to find interpretations.
7. A complete contradiction which shows that the author was unclear as to what he was saying

Apparently, all of the above shades of meanings apart from point five (5) appear to tie with the intended usage of 'ambiguous' in this discourse. Commonwealth Literature from its inception, like a cursed child infested with an unidentified ailment from its mother's womb, is bedevilled with unascertained birth and evolution. Its origin and evolutionary history appear to be paralysed by imprecision. John Rothfork does not hesitate to ascribe as one of the reasons for the weakness of works called 'Commonwealth Literature', the fact that, "taxonomically the designations never escape their flawed origins" (1). Beyond reasonable doubt, Commonwealth Literature exists and meets in the most part, classic definition criteria of what may be considered as literature. To stretch this point further, it would be necessary to briefly consider what literature is, in the first place. In *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, J. A. Cuddon and C. E. Preston state that literature is "a vague term which usually denotes works which belong to the major genres: epic, drama, lyric, novel, short story ode" (472). They add that, "we describe something as 'literature', as opposed to anything else, if the term carries with it qualitative connotations which imply that the work in question has superior qualities; that it is well above the ordinary run of written works" (472). This could be expanded to consider the definition that argues that "Literature in present times generally taken to be imaginative compositions, mainly

printed but earlier (and still, in some cultures) was oral, whether dramatic, metrical or prose in form. (Peter Childs and Roger Fowler 129). Commonwealth Literature fits squarely in the above citations, although “understanding exactly what literature is has always been a challenge; pinning down a definition has proven to be quite difficult” (Jim Meyer 1). However, it must be underlined also that, a literature that is born not out of a homogenous cultural group, community or people, but of unprecedented historical events, such as the Commonwealth of Nations and the associated motifs, has its peculiarities that seem to move away from classic consideration of the term. It is in this perspective that I think it would be rewarding to consider George McFadden’s opinion:

...literature is a canon which consists of those works in language by which a community defines itself through the course of its history. It includes works primarily artistic and also those whose aesthetic qualities are only secondary. The self-defining activity of the community is conducted in the light of the works, as its members have come to read them (or concretize them). (56)

Principally, I think literature should first and foremost be viewed as a set of written works that address themselves to a given community or people, then the ‘how’, that is, the aesthetics and or artistic quality can follow. Going by this consideration, Commonwealth Literature becomes problematic as it addresses no precise cultural community. Rather, it stands as works from diverse communities written in English Language. The question that may be posed is whether Anglophone Cameroon Literature, for example, written by Anglophone Cameroonians, should be considered as Commonwealth Literature by virtue of its linguistic consideration. Anglophone Cameroon Literature, characteristically, is nationalistic, protesting in the most part against marginalisation not from the west, but from their fellow Francophone Cameroonians, who are in power in the once Federated State of Cameroon, but now *La Republique du Cameroun*. Commonwealth Literature is certainly incomparable to other literatures such as the English, American, French, African, and the Caribbean, just to name these. The reason is simple – unlike Commonwealth Literature, they are works that address specific and well define communities and cultures.

Briefly tracing the origin of Commonwealth Literature sounds superfluous or appears to be recounting the historical facts that we are conversant with. However, it may help, if not to untie the nod associated with its definition and classification, it may illuminate some of the reasons given for the confusion connected with the expression. Historically, after the passage of the Statute of Westminster in 1931, which granted full autonomy to the Dominions of the British Empire, the original British Commonwealth was set up whose members consisted only of British Dominions that were required to be united by a common allegiance to the Crown. Besides the United Kingdom, members of the British Commonwealth consisted of: Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Union of South Africa, Irish Free State, Newfoundland (until 1933). They were later joined in 1947-1948 by: India, Pakistan, Ceylon. In 1949, the British Commonwealth was replaced by the Commonwealth of Nations with the adoption of the London Declaration, in

which members were no longer required to have the British Monarch as sovereign, but could have their own head of state and were required to only recognise the British Monarch as Head of the Commonwealth. On 26th January 1950, India became the first country to qualify under these new criteria after becoming a republic. Pakistan became the second republican member in 1956. Malaya (now Malaysia) became the first member to have its own indigenous monarch, joining in 1957. Membership criteria were further redefined in 1991 with the Harare Declaration, which required members to abide by the principles of democracy and respect for human rights. These can be enforced upon current members, who may be suspended or expelled for failure to abide by them. After the accession of Mozambique to the Commonwealth in 1995 becoming its first non former British Empire member, being a former Portuguese colony, but interacting with Commonwealth members, membership criteria was even further redefined by the Edinburgh Declaration of 1997: (accept and comply with the Harare principles; be fully sovereign states; recognise the monarch of the Commonwealth Realms as the Head of the Commonwealth; accept the English language as the means of Commonwealth communication; respect the wishes of the general population *vis-à-vis* Commonwealth membership;).

The historical development of Commonwealth Literature is characterised by uncertain and ambiguous rules that make it difficult to trace its defining rules. Membership criteria kept changing and finally brought non-formal British colonies into the Association. Trying, therefore, to define Commonwealth Literature from the standpoint of its origin and development, that is, as a literature of formal British colonies, meets with obstacles. The definition is inappropriate because Mozambique, a non British colony, like many others does not fit into it.

Commonwealth and Postcolonial Literatures Begging for Definition

The vagueness associated with the origin and evolution of Commonwealth Literature accounts in the most part for the headache in situating it. The expression “Commonwealth Literature” evolved and changed within a brief time span and caused the confusion that plague the domain. Edward O Ako discusses the ideological uses of the concept and argues that “the textual forms that emerged as ‘resistance’ to imperial domination were referred to by a multiplicity of terms: Commonwealth Literature, New English Literature, Literature in English, Third World Literature, World Fiction, Minority Literature, Multicultural Literature, or Postcolonial Literature” (3). This reveals just how uncertain and difficult it is to describe the literature. The term, generally, is an ambiguous expression, which defines English-language works written in the former British colonies or place which had the status of dominions. It is a body of fictional works grouped together because of the underlying cultural history and certain recurrent patterns. Elizabeth Ermath attempts to avoid the ambiguity by summarising it as “a point of transition where facts and fiction or history and literature merge” (38). Ermath’s opinion is a clear sign post but that quickly leads one to wider meandering crossroads. For Helen Tiffin, the notion of Commonwealth Literature is in itself “condescending, narrow and misleading” (1). The controversy is aggravated when one considers the opinions of

critics, in *Learning from Each Other: Commonwealth Studies in the 21st Century*, where the authors think that the scope of Commonwealth Literature should be widened further to include literature in local or indigenous languages. If this were to happen, then the historical justification of the term and the prescriptions of the Edinburgh Declaration of 1997, that it should be literature produced in the English Language, will be defeated. A household critic in Commonwealth Literature, Salman Rushdie, posits that Commonwealth Literature is “a body of writing created, I think, in the English language by persons who are not themselves white Britons or Irish or citizens of the United States of America” (63). Rushdie believed that the concept or notion of Commonwealth Literature is intended to produce another genre or category of literature out of English Literature and that the “effect of creating such a ghetto was, is, to change the meaning of the far broader term ‘English literature’ which I’d always taken to mean simply the literature of the English language - into something far narrower, something topographical, nationalistic, possibly even racially segregationist” (63). What complicates things further are the overlapping characteristics of both Commonwealth and Postcolonial Literature. Rothfork observes that, “Both these terms thus fall under the rubric of what is generalised in terms of the expression ‘post-colonial literatures’ ...they both involve a kind of homogenisation, that is contradictory to the very politics of highlighting these colonially repressed literary traditions”(1).

The inability to strike a consensus definition of Commonwealth Literature provokes varied hypothesis about the expression. Perhaps as a way out, Rushdie thinks that ‘Commonwealth Literature Does not Exist’. The questions that may follow from this claim are: If Commonwealth Literature exists, what then is it? Can we homogenise the varied kinds of literary texts that are produced in these vastly different countries as something unitary in the form of a ‘Commonwealth Literature’? An attempt to define postcolonial literature may play the trick and so help to say what Commonwealth Literature is not; if it is possible indeed, considering that postcolonial literature in itself is not a clear-cut concept. First, to define it in its most basic form as “that which happens after political independence” is to miss many possible applications of the concept; and second, “to define post-colonialism according to its political implications shifts attention away from the importance of the work as literature and lessens the intentions of the author”(John Yang 1). To make things worse, Antwan Jefferson contends that, “At best, defining post-colonialism can be considered a work in progress” (1). According to him, this definition in progress further problematises post-colonial literature because without a solid source, scholars can debate forever what constitutes a post-colonial work and if that work gives justice to post-colonial literature as a whole” (1). Kwaku Asante-Darko stretches the idea further by arguing that “Post-colonial literature is a synthesis of protest and imitation. It blends revolt and conciliation (2). He adds that “this duality permeates its stratagem, its style, and its themes in a manner that is not always readily perceptible to critics” (2). In *Postcolonialism: “the Empire Writes Back”*, the authors point out that “Postcolonialism consists of a set of theories in philosophy and various approaches to literary analysis that are concerned with literature written in

English in countries that were or still are colonies of other countries” (199-200). He adds that “For the most part, postcolonial studies excludes literature that represents either British or American viewpoints and concentrates on writings from colonised or formerly colonised cultures” (199-200). The diversity of events that postcolonial studies grapple with makes the concept pretty slippery to pin down. For the past two decades, both the term and the field of postcolonialism have been subjected to thorough and extensive criticism from the perspectives of literary, political and religious studies. Theorists take different views about this field of study. From an optimistic point of view, Lazare S Rukundwa and Andries G van Aarde observe that “postcolonial theory is a means of defiance by which any exploitative and discriminative practices, regardless of time and space, can be challenged” (1). They add that, by contrast, “the pessimistic view regards postcolonial theory as ambiguous, ironic and superstitious” (1). A postcolonial study is an extensive field opened to a multiplicity of descriptions, which may be summarised broadly into historical, political, social and economic sense. Historically, it describes, in Henry Schwarz’s words, “the movements for national liberation that ended Europe’s political domination of the globe” (1). Evidently, postcolonial studies expand beyond historical consideration, to include social concerns. Concretely, colonisers also tend to implant modern structures on their territories. For Schwarz, these include aspects such as “the exploitive economic system of capitalism and political structures borrowed from Europe such as territorial boundaries, parliaments, and censuses that de facto transform traditional practices into modern ones that can never be repudiated if a new nation is to participate in the international state system once it is liberated” (3). Thus, Schwarz contends that “it is not sufficient to limit postcolonial studies to strictly historicist explanations. A number of sociological, economic, and philosophical questions have been raised within the field that cannot be contained within historical description” (5).

Commonwealth and Postcolonial Literature: The Dividing Line.

The main features of Commonwealth and postcolonial literature are intertwined and usually pose a major problem to tear them apart. However, I think it is important to distinctively identify those elements that belong to one and not to the other of these related concepts. This would help to stake the boundary between the two notions and keep them apart as separate entities which they are supposed to be. In Sunday Agboola Olatunji’s opinion, “the complexity of postcolonialism in practice has led to a definitional problem”. Therefore, “this issue requires clarification” (125), at least for the purpose of this discourse. This would resolve the difficulty and avoid the melange most readers make of the two terms. In Ako’s words, some of these scholars “shy away from the term ‘commonwealth’ and prefer to use such terms as ‘postcolonial’” (5). It would be necessary to underline that Commonwealth and Postcolonial Literature, no matter how closely related they appear to be must not be bunched-up as alternative terms without demarcation. We would not be doing justice to scholarship, if the twin expressions are not distinguished. In his definition, Ako states that, “the term ‘postcolonial’ is far more constrained than ‘commonwealth,’ although the former may in theory (but frequently does not in practice) encompass a wider field geographically” (5). On the one hand he argues that “Commonwealth studies potentially offer democratic and all-inclusive forms

of social analysis, pointing to reconstructed societies and to communities beyond colonialism” (5). In the same vein, Olatunji posits that it is “a multifaceted and complex phenomenon which yields itself to various interpretations, uses and multiplicity of meanings (125). He adds that it is “a historical phenomenon which is linked to the observation, consideration and interrogation of the philosophical orientation, praxis and effects of colonialism on other societies” (3). “It questions, rather than confirms, the process of history” (Hutcheon 133).

The historical element features as a major distinction between Commonwealth Literature and Postcolonial Discourse. Although no literature, not even Commonwealth Literature can be said to be completely detached from its history. Postcolonial Literature unlike Commonwealth Literature, is particularly tied to and informed by its history. African written literature, to differentiate with African Oral Literature, is relatively new. It commenced with the advent of colonialism. This should not be implied that there was no African literature or culture before the advent of the westerners. After all, the rich, colourful and complex oral traditions existed. As literature that is informed by its history, “it opposes and interrogates the European ethnocentric philosophy which considers the western culture as the centre of human cultures or a ‘sommun bonum’ that all other cultures must aspire towards” (Boehner 12). He adds that “it emphasizes the beauty and potentialities of the ‘third world’ cultures tactically pushed to the margins” (12). According to Boehner, “It is the voice of the liminalised peoples against the philosophical arrogance of the so-called established centres” (13). The importance of history cannot be overemphasised, for it orientates a people towards their roots. Olatunji asserts that history “enables human beings to learn from the past in order to modify the present so as to create a better future” (127). Woodson points out that “If a race has no history, if it has no worthwhile tradition, it becomes a negligible factor in the thought of the world and it stands the danger of being exterminated” (10-11). This infers that a people must be conscious of their history, “if they must continue to be responsible members of the human race” (Olatunji 127).

Language is another benchmark that demarcates postcolonial discourse from Commonwealth Literature. Rothfork holds that Commonwealth Literature is produced in English Language while postcolonial literature is translated into English. “Commonwealth literature (from the Commonwealth of Nations, hence written in English) and postcolonial literature (translated into English)” (1). Rothfork’s opinion, theoretically holds but practically is not feasible because it is not plausible to think that an author would first write in his native language and later translate into English, ‘the language of Commonwealth Literature’. Even if that were possible, what then constitutes the difference between the postcolonial text translated into English and the commonwealth text initially written in English? The language difference is rather visible, when it is considered as an instrument of struggle or protest in Postcolonial Literature, a phenomenon which is absent in Commonwealth Literature. Ashcroft et al, contend that “language is a fundamental site of struggle for postcolonial discourse because the colonial process begins in language” (283). Similarly, Amuta points out that “the most

enduring symptom of the colonialist fixation of discourse on African literature is the problematization of the language question” (). In the same vein, Olaniyan observes, “the imposition of colonial languages is the imposition of colonial culture” (39). Imperial imposition also brought about the suppression of the languages of the colonised. “The culture and history carried by these languages were thereby thrown on to the rubbish heap... to perish” (Ngugi 31). Considering the importance of language, African writers have engaged in a debate with two dominant positions emerging. Writers like Ngugi and Osundare suggest that linguistic indigenisation should be a condition for the existence of African literature. For instance, Ngugi asserted that “to neglect our languages and grab those of foreigners is tantamount to blasphemy” (254), while Osundare insisted that “the future of African literature and culture belongs to African languages” (66).

A major characteristic of postcolonial discourse, which separates it from Commonwealth Literature, is its radical opposition to colonial universalism. It is basically, protest literature as Kwaku Asante-Darko posits, “The African colonial experience has dominated the origin and nature of contemporary African protest literature and rendered it opposed to Western standards of aesthetics (2). Similarly, Shrikant B. Sawant argues that “The Post - colonial Literature and theory investigate what happens when two cultures clash and one of them with accompanying ideology empowers and deems itself superior to other” (120). Olatunji describing this phenomenon in other terms as universalism, observes that,

Universalism is precipitated by the hegemonic western epistemology developed to devalue the cultures of the other societies. It is rather unfortunate that many Africans accept the western concept of globalization without questions. The concept means economic and cultural developments of the West at the expense of the Africans. People should first develop locally, so that they can interact well with other peoples at global level. (128)

Unlike Commonwealth Literature, Postcolonial Literature, thematically, reacts to western concept of universalism by placing accent in their writing on “the beauty, dignity and excellence of black African life and culture” (Palmer 126), the privileging of the “distinctive characteristics, the difference of postcolonial societies” (Ashcroft et al. 55); and according to Hall, “the displacement of the ‘centred’ discourses of the West... questioning its transcendental claims to speak for everyone while being itself everywhere and nowhere” (226). To move away from western ‘superior’ cultural ideology, African authors focus on concepts such as ‘hybridism’ and syncretism, and “misreading”.

Establishing a difference between Commonwealth and Postcolonial Literature can also be done from the angle of the concerns of both literatures, especially, in reclaiming spaces and places. Sarah Harrison argues that, “colonialism was, above all, a means of claiming and exploiting foreign lands, resources, and people. Enslavement, indentured labour, and migration forced many indigenous populations to move from the places that they considered ‘home’” (1). In her opinion, “Postcolonial literature

attempts to counteract their resulting alienation from their surroundings by restoring a connection between indigenous people and places through description, narration, and dramatization” (1). Characteristically, Postcolonial unlike Commonwealth Literature is marked by resistant descriptions. Harrison points out that “Postcolonial writers use detailed descriptions of indigenous people, places, and practices to counteract or ‘resist’ the stereotypes, inaccuracies, and generalizations which the colonizers circulated in educational, legal, political, and social texts and settings” (1).

Also, reworking colonial art-forms is a vivid artistic characteristic of postcolonial literature, which may not be very visible in Commonwealth Literature. Similarly, Harrison observes that Authors such as Arundhati Roy “rework European art-forms like the novel to reflect indigenous modes of invention and creation”. She stretches the point further when she says, “They reshape imported colonial art-forms to incorporate the style, structure, and themes of indigenous modes of creative expression, such as oral poetry and dramatic performances” (1). On the whole, the difference between the two concepts lies in the historical elements, language, and themes.

Conclusion

Commonwealth Literature is unique in the sense that the expression is commonly used but most difficult to ascribe a clear cut definition. Meanwhile, Postcolonial studies, in Pennycook’s opinion, “have been central to world history over the last two centuries. They have produced and reduced nations, massacred populations, dispossessed people of their land, culture, language and history, shifted vast number of people from one place to another” (19). Authors have resorted to using ‘Commonwealth Literature’ and ‘Postcolonial Literature’ as alternative expressions. Others think that Commonwealth Literature is the old form of Postcolonial Studies. Rowland Smith is one of those who believe that Commonwealth Literature has lost its place to Postcolonial literature and has become history. In his opinion, it does not exist any longer and so can be addressed in a new name called Postcolonial Literature. He argues:

Once upon a time there used to be a field called Commonwealth Literature.

Then Salman Rushdie wrote an essay called “Commonwealth Literature Does Not Exist”, and lo and behold, Commonwealth Literature ceased to exist. Or, rather, it got repackaged as Postcolonial Literature(s), Postcolonial Studies, and Postcolonial theory...at my university the Department calendar used Commonwealth/Postcolonial for a few years while the plastic surgery was in progress, dropping the Commonwealth altogether in 1993. (199)

Whether or not Commonwealth Literature died and reincarnated as Postcolonial Literature, the two terms are still essentially used today. Even if Commonwealth Literature were to be alluded only as history, it should be noted that the events that led to its birth and its preoccupations are different from the concerns of Postcolonial Literature. For instance, a future shift in events that motivated the production of postcolonial discourse and theory cannot suggest the death or extinction of Postcolonial Literature. For example, the advantages of globalisation and cultural integration may soon question the relevance

of Postcolonial Literature, which is centred on protest against imposing western presence, especially, in a world that is fast moving towards perfection and in a single cultural village. After all, “Yesterday’s brash counter-discourse is today’s comfortable discourse of power” (Ken Goodwin 142). One of the reasons for the incorporation of Commonwealth Literatures into the ‘English’ curriculum according to Godwin is that it is a body of writing in English from outside the United Kingdom and the United States of America that is worthy of study. Godwin remarks that “the introduction of ‘literary’ qualities into discourse is, of course, almost always characterised by multi-faceted, ambiguous, and often contradictory principles” (143). He argues that its inclusion is “to displace the literature of Britain from its central place in the tertiary (that is, post secondary-school) literary curriculum” (144). This argument insinuates that it would be a mistake not to think that Commonwealth Literature exists in its own right or keep thinking that Commonwealth Literature is an alternative term to Postcolonial Literature. In the same light, Godwin points out that “‘Commonwealth Literature’ and its other surrogates seem to refer basically to a field of study, specifically a body of texts ...seem to be cognate with ‘British literature’, ‘Victorian literature’, or ‘American literature’, that is, they seem to denote primarily a body of potential texts for study” (144). He contends that, ‘Postcolonial literature(s)’ also has this denotation, “but it also represents in a way quite different from the alternative terms, a process or a set of reading practices. One can produce a ‘postcolonial reading’ of a text, but hardly a ‘Commonwealth Literature’ interpretation” (144). Godwin concludes that “‘postcolonial’ is cognate not with ‘Commonwealth Literature’ but with ‘New Criticism’” (144-45). In the same vein, “the concept of ‘Commonwealth Literature’ as a separate disciplinary area within English studies began in the early 1960s in both the United States and England” (Bill Ashcroft et al. 45).

It is worth noting Iva Polak’s observation that “The term ‘postcolonial’ has definitely avoided some of the problems of its terminological predecessors (Commonwealth literatures and New Literatures in English), but has created problems of its own” (135). Polak implies that Commonwealth Literature and new literatures in English are different from Postcolonial Literature, which is a new emergence with its new problems or preoccupations. It is important to remember that the insistency involved in the birth and development of Commonwealth Literature causes its writers and critics to slight into another closely related writing, but motivated by events that are fundamentally and historically different. These differences therefore must not escape our memory and should help us to keep the two expressions distinctively apart. Admittedly, the related concerns of both Commonwealth and Postcolonial Literature make it difficult to situate them but this should not cause the reader to lose sight of the inherent differences between the two. Whichever approach that may be taken towards Commonwealth Studies, one thing is certain that it exists in its own right, although fusing into every direction like rainclouds and changing features like a chameleon.

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Chinese-Western Narrative Poetics: State of the Art

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Chinese narrative poetics² has attracted considerable scholarly enquiry over the past several decades. In the world of literary theory and criticism, this surge in interest might be explained by two major factors. First, the quantity and quality of Chinese narrative literature, both pre-modern and contemporary, have been remarkable enough to make a continuum of Chinese narrative poetics self-justifiable. Many scholars have therefore begun to survey, in the light of contemporary narrative theory, the Chinese narrative repository for “gems”—both lustrous and hidden. Second, Western structural narratology, with all its intricate systematicity, has been questioned from a growing diversity of perspectives amid new theoretic trends. In this sense, it might be said that comparative studies have taken vantage points rightly upon the inadequacies of the structuralist approach, of which Terry Eagleton offered a general critique thirty years ago:

Structuralism and phenomenology, dissimilar though they are in central ways, both spring from the ironic act of shutting out the material world in order the better to illuminate our consciousness of it. For anyone who believes that consciousness is in an important sense *practical*, inseparably bound up with the ways we act in and on reality, any such move is bound to be self-defeating. It is rather like killing a person in order to examine, more conveniently, the circulation of the blood. (Eagleton 1996, 95)

It could be very unfair to compare the structuralist approach to “killing a person to examine blood circulation” in the sense that the foundation of any theory always presupposes and entails a certain form of “anatomy” (Frye 1957). Nevertheless, Eagleton’s critique is still meaningful for an impartial reflection upon the possible limitations of structural narratology. As is widely agreed, the structuralist approach to narrative can become biased by analysing structural elements and principles independently of a larger socio-cultural context. Besides, through the structuralist lens which focalizes exclusively the deep and surface levels of text, certain subtle transactions essential to the processes of narrative creation and interpretation might not have been addressed with due attention or importance. For instance, how do we view the death

and/or return of the author, or even his/her eternity in the Shakespearean sense.³ How do we think of the author who has “fathered” a piece of work through his choices, design, values and intentions? How do we understand the affective force of a narrative? To what extent can an author, or even the intrusive critic for that matter, make use of his “license” for generic or stylistic experimentation? Can there be permutations that defy, or deviate from, structuralist narrative categorization? How does an author’s “literary genius” determine the “literary and aesthetic attainment” of a work? Could there be a message beyond what is implied in narrative structuralization? The list could go on.

Traditional Chinese narrative poetics, however, has explored in its own right issues of authority, literary mind, narrative craftsmanship, moral and philosophical underpinnings, superstructure and macrostructure, psychological sophistication, unity in miscellaneity, real in unreal, et cetera. In prominent contradistinction to Western structural narrative theory, traditional Chinese narrative poetics is salient in the following three aspects. First, instead of being “apt to beat over matters”,⁴ it places particular importance on literary intuition, pleasure from punctilious (sometimes repetitive) critical reading, and fluidity of the aesthetic–appreciative process. It is interesting to note that such features are also common to many other forms of Chinese art. Second, there seems to be a perennial interest in the socio-historical meanings of narratives, which led to the common use of meta-narratives by the author and an assiduous quest for, and construction of, authorial intentions and images by the reader–critic. Needless to say, representative masterpieces of Chinese fiction, for example, *Dream of the Red Chamber*, *The Water Margin*, and *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, are all structured and narrated around certain Chinese philosophical hypotheses about the social life or the human being,⁵ and generations of critics have been obsessed with revealing the personality of the author not only through all the niceties and nuances of what’s been said but also through what might have been unsaid by the author and what is implied by the macrostructure as well as in the style,⁶ that is, the inarticulate. Third, instead of establishing a specific set of critical terminology, traditional Chinese narrative poetics shows only a conservative interest in theoretical innovation by enlisting and invigorating pre-existing notions which are essentially trans-generic and mostly metaphorical.

There seems to have been a well-measured, though seemingly paradoxical, scheme to both bring out the generic particularities of narrative fiction and blur its boundaries with the other genres of literature or art. This feature is manifested in narrative discourse as well as in critical discourse. In terms of narrative discourse, Chinese fiction, with its priority on storytelling, also serves as a “melting pot” or “symbiotic site” for the fine features of many other genres such as historiography, mythology, street storytelling, drama, poetry, and *belles-lettres*, which has not only enriched the Chinese literary experience of novel reading, but may also have shaped its taste for “masterwork”⁷ or “book of genius”.⁸ In terms of critical discourse, one easily finds that the criticism of fiction assimilated the same set of critical vocabulary as that originally intended for drama, poetry, painting and calligraphy, embroidery, or even garden architecture and “wind and water” geomancy. For example, the very word for structure (*jiegou*, 結構),

meaning texture (*jie*, 結) and framework (*gou*, 構), developed from the art of architecture or gadgetry, and the ineffable but strategic notion *zhangfa*, 章法, literally, principles of composition, was borrowed from the art of painting and calligraphy, where it means the configuration of space (on an unfolded scroll of paper) and the regulation of tempo in order to create a work of art with structural integrity and unity.

From these salient features, it may be further summarized that Chinese narrative poetics, with due focus on narrativity and literariness, has prioritized the importance of “heart” or “literary mind”⁹ (presumably communicable among the ideal author, critic, and reader). The latter is thought to be capable of mediating and adapting critical notions and appreciation across different artistic genres. In addition, Chinese narrative poetics has developed from and reinforced a reading habit where narratives become something more, that is, the reader–critic is quite naturally split between the enigma of the author and the specific socio-historical situations that his narrative may fit in.¹⁰ This aspect of Chinese narrative poetics is comparable with Western “auteur theory” and the narrative concept of “implied author”—though with big differences. All the above issues will be dealt with in the chapters that follow.

With such unique features, categories and experience, Chinese narrative poetics may shed some new light on today’s narrative research, both structural and post-structural. The potential complementarity between Chinese and Western narrative poetics makes it highly necessary for comparative research to be conducted so that not only a fuller picture of narrative theorisation can be revealed, but also a multiculturally intelligible theory can be constructed to meet a growing global awareness and the evolving landscape in worldwide narrative practice.

It is encouraging to see that, over the past several decades, this impervious domain has been penetrated by a growing cohort of Western scholars (some with Chinese background), who are represented by Andrew H. Plaks, David L. Rolston, James J. Y. Liu, Stephen Owen, Patrick Hanan, Victor H. Mair, Robert E. Hegel, C. T. Hsia, Anthony C. Yu, David Roy, Cyril Birch, John Bishop, Zong-qi Cai, Ming Dong Gu, Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu, among others. Although some of them have had their research area identified as literary theory or comparative literature or even sinology, they have each made a contribution to the introduction and clarification of an alien system of narrative poetics to Western academia. However, as the field remains underexplored (especially so by narratologists) and precludes synchronic comparisons, delineating major research phases or orientations becomes quite a challenge. In pondering a solution, I was inspired by the morphology of the Chinese verb *jiejian*, 借鉴, which pragmatically is equivalent to “learning from” or “drawing on”, comprises the character *jie* 借, meaning either “to borrow” or “to lend”, and *jian* 鉴, meaning “the mirror”. This led me further to an association with Western scholar M. H. Abrams’s well-known metaphors of the “mirror” and the “lamp”.¹¹ Therefore I thought of building on these two metaphors to bring out three different but interrelated approaches in the field, namely, “borrow a foreign mirror”, “polish its own mirror”, and “light a lamp for interillumination”.

BORROW A FOREIGN MIRROR AND POLISH CHINA’S OWN

These two approaches are put under one caption because they have taken place in approximately the same period, with the latter emerging as a dynamic response to the former. The need for borrowing a foreign mirror has increased dramatically since the 1980s with the end of the Cultural Revolution. Translation of Western narrative theory has become so active that “by mid-1990s, all the major works of Western classical narratology had Chinese versions”¹² (Zhao 2009, 5). Among these endeavours of translation, two deserve special mention: one is the concentrated translation of French “narratologie” convened by Zhang Yinde,¹³ the other a massive twenty-five volume *Collection on European and American Literary Theories*¹⁴ undertaken by the Institute of Foreign Literature of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Since the turn of the century, translation of Western narrative theory has kept abreast of its latest development, one major output being the *New Narrative Theory Translations*¹⁵ series convened by Dan Shen and undertaken by leading Chinese narratologists. Apart from translations, a number of academic works introducing or interpreting Western narrative theory have been published by Chinese scholars. This mainly takes the form of various course books on narrative theory, such as *An Introduction to Narratology*.¹⁶ However, there are also pioneering interdisciplinary studies, such as *Narratology and the Stylistics of Fiction*,¹⁷ *Studies on Narrative Theories in Anglo-American Novels*,¹⁸ *Metalinguistics: the Principle of Narratology and Understanding*,¹⁹ and *Cyber Narratology*,²⁰ and comparative studies, such as *When Narrator is Narrated: Introduction to Comparative Narratology*,²¹ to name but a few. The past three decades has also produced a huge corpus of Chinese journal publications on narrative theory. Among the 16,281 CNKI-searchable²² journal articles with titles containing the key word *xushi* (narrative), 690 have the key word *xushixue* (narratology) in their titles, 131 have *xushililun* (narrative theory), and 102 *xushuxue* (an alternative name to *xushixue*, narratology).

On the other hand, it merits attention that such “mirror borrowing” has been bidirectional involving also the West’s reception of Chinese narrative poetics, though on much more a modest scale. Among the elite sinologists who specialized in introducing, interpreting, and translating Chinese poetics, at least two should not be left unmentioned: Stephen Owen and David L. Rolston. Owen is a rare Western scholar well versed, and with significant achievements, in Chinese language and literature. With a focus on Tang poetry, his scholarly reach extends to almost all periods of Chinese literature. In his important work *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, he compiled a rich selection of works on poetics by authors ranging from Confucius (551–479 BCE) to Ye Xie (1627–1703), and provided his own translations and interpretations. Of the selected pieces, some have strong explanatory power for Chinese narrative in general and hold special narratological significance even today, for example, *A Discourse on Literature* by Cao Pi,²³ the emperor–scholar, *The Poetic Exposition on Literature* by Lu Ji,²⁴ and *Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* by Liu Xie.²⁵ The first two pieces attempted to prescribe the general properties of literature. In *A Discourse on Literature*, for example,

Cao Pi proposed that “In literature, *qi*²⁶ is the dominant factor”,²⁷ giving rise to normative forms (*ti*)²⁸ clear or murky.” This point has greatly shaped the Chinese spiritual pursuit in, and its overall evaluation of, literature, which prioritised the “empty” or “plastic” (such as *qi*) over all formal attributes (or *ti*). The flexible use of *ti*²⁹ also shows that, in Chinese critical discourse, the potential for “resonance” always holds primacy over the state of “precision”. In another remark, Cao Pi asserted that “literary works are the supreme achievements in the business of state, a splendour that does not decay.” (Owen 1992, 65)³⁰ This point explains why literature has remained a public instrument for such a long time in Chinese history. In a way, this ancient remark by Cao Pi also scratched the surface of a modern theory on author’s subjectivity.

Different from Owen’s systematic interest and versatile scholarship, Rolston’s contribution in this field is represented by his concentrated research into Chinese fiction of the Ming–Qing Dynasties, particularly through fiction commentary (*pingdian*, 评点), a colourful treasure house of indigenous Chinese narrative thought. Rolston’s representative works in this field include *Traditional Chinese Fiction and Fiction Commentary* and *How to Read the Chinese Novel*. He described his approach as an endeavour to avoid “the imposition of foreign frameworks and literary theory onto a tradition alien to them” (Rolston 1990, Preface) in the reality of the universal acceptance of the so-called “new and sharper tools for analysing style, narrative method, and modes of structuring” (Plaks 1977, Foreword by Cyril Birch) derived from Western narratology. Rolston has done a remarkable job delving into the voluminous four Ming novel masterworks³¹ in their commentary editions. He revisited a rich corpus of narrative poetics that is highly dialogic to Western narrative theory in terms of techniques, authorship, structuralization, and characterization. For example, Rolston opted to defend “the need for an author” (Plaks 1977, 111) through studying the typical “commentator–narrator” (a term he coined) in Chinese fiction. This he believed not only serves ideological infiltration or some didactic function but more importantly is a justified legacy of “the simulated context of oral storytelling” (Plaks 1977, 284), which, in addition to historiography, was another major source for the inception of Chinese fiction.³² Rolston highlighted the importance of macrostructure in understanding Chinese fiction, pointing out that not only the four steps of general plotting, namely, beginning (*qi*, 起), development (*cheng*, 承), turn (*zhuan*, 转), and closure (*he*, 合), follow the change of the four seasons in the natural world, but even the specific number of episodes in a novel may agree with rules in *The Book of Changes* (or *I Ching*). Apart from interpretation, Rolston also compiled the translations of six pieces of “reading methodology” (*dufa*, 读法) for the six corresponding novels. Written by the great Ming–Qing critics, these articles are heavily laden with Chinese narrative thought. For example, in *How to Read The Fifth Book of Genius*³³, Jin Shengtan generalized fifteen types of “literary devices” (*wenfa*, 文法) frequently applied in the narration of *The Water Margin*. Among them, there are those that vividly reflect the trans-generic, aesthetical, and empiricist nature of Chinese narrative poetics. Examples include: “snake in the grass or [discontinuous]

chalk line” (*caoshehuixian fa*, 草蛇灰线法, “heavy strokes of ink” (*daluomo fa*, 大落墨法), “clouds cutting the mountains in half” (*hengyunduan shan fa*, 横山断云法), “needles wrapped in cotton and thorns hidden in the mud” (*mianzhennici fa*, 棉泥针刺法). As well there are those that are potentially comparable with Western narrative theory, such as: “advance insertion” (*dao cha fa*, 倒插法) which has comparative value with “foreshadowing” or “prolepsis”, “strokes of direct duplication” (*zhengfan fa*, 正犯法) and “strokes of incomplete duplication” (*lüefan fa*, 略犯法) which are comparable with the concept of “frequency”, and “strokes of extreme frugality” (*jisheng fa*, 极省法) and “strokes of extreme avoidance of frugality” (*jibusheng fa*, 极不省法), which are comparable with “duration”. Such potentials for comparison will be systematically tapped in Chapter Three.

The accumulated effort to “borrow a foreign mirror” has been accompanied with a growing need to “polish the Chinese mirror”. Over the past three decades or so, not only has narratology come to the fore of literary studies in China and been established as a research discipline, but it has also greatly stimulated research interest in China’s indigenous narrative poetics, as well as narratological enquiries into Chinese narrative fiction. Insofar as this newly acquired interest is concerned, three major focuses can be further distinguished.

One focus is on the narratological studies of traditional Chinese fiction, represented by Chen Pingyuan’s *Shifts in the Narrative Mode of Chinese fiction*,³⁴ and Wang Ping’s *Traditional Chinese Fiction: A Narratological Perspective*.³⁵ Chen’s research marked one of the earliest in China to “bridge the internal and external studies of literature and combine a purely formalist narratological study of fiction with a culture-conscious sociological one”. (Chen 1988, 2)³⁶ While Wang’s research pioneered the study of Chinese fiction with a comprehensive Western narratological paradigm.

Another area of research is into Chinese narrative tradition and traditional narrative poetics, represented by Fu Xiuyan’s *Studies on Pre-Qin Narrative: The Formalization of Chinese Narrative Tradition*³⁷ and the three-volume series *Narrative Thought in Ancient China*,³⁸ chief-edited by Zhao Yanqiu. Fu’s work approached Chinese narrative from the broad sense of “narrative”, which subsumes all the regulated forms of narration, and probed into the origination and intellectual foundation of Chinese narrative tradition in the Pre-Qin Period.³⁹ Fu has fundamentally conditioned the rules and characteristics of Chinese narrative of later eras. Whereas, the works of Zhao et al. marked the first systematic research into traditional Chinese narrative poetics by scholars who are also learned in Western narratology.

The third focus is the more specialized enquiry into traditional Chinese fiction commentary, particularly that of the Ming and Qing Dynasties, which is thought to be a splendid treasure house of indigenous Chinese narrative poetics. Representative research in this area includes Lin Gang’s *Studies on Fiction Commentary of the Ming*

and Qing Dynasties⁴⁰, and Zhang Shijun's *Narrative Concepts in Ming–Qing Fiction Commentary*⁴¹.

Although highly necessary, polishing the Chinese mirror is far from being adequate so far as developing narratology as an academic discipline is concerned. For, evidently, research in this direction is all too easily drawn into a vortex which can surely be contradicting, because it intends to show that this Chinese mirror is somewhat exceptional, if not superior, but in doing so it simply cannot resist the temptation of Western narrative concepts, which are so often expropriated to lend expression or validity to their Chinese opposite numbers. This brings into focus another orientation in comparative studies, one that aims for higher degrees of disciplinary openness and dialogic significance.

LIGHTALAMPFORINTERILLUMINATION

Apart from the mirrored approaches, we may discern another ambitious effort to make a radiant projector of Chinese narrative poetics. In other words, by systematically foregrounding its heterogeneity and critical strengths against Western narrative theory, scholars of this orientation have sought to establish a distinctive branch of Chinese narratology. The most prominent research work includes: Andrew H. Plaks's *Chinese Narrative: Critical and Theoretical Essays* (ed.), *Chinese Narratology, Archetype and Allegory in Dream of the Red Chamber*, *Conceptual Models in Chinese Narrative Theory*, Yang Yi's *Chinese Narratology*⁴², and Ming Dong Gu's *Chinese Theories of Fiction: A Non-Western Narrative System*. Plaks targeted what he defined as Chinese masterworks and explored deeply some macroscopic but profound aspects of Chinese narrative, such as: archetype and mythology in Chinese narrative tradition, structural modes of masterworks, conceptual models in Chinese narrative thought, rhetorical features, allegory and allegorical reading. Of Plaks's pioneering research, Cyril Birch spoke highly in his Foreword to *Chinese Narrative: Critical and Theoretical Essays*:

Andrew Plaks makes a gallant proposal for a critical theory of narrative derived from the specific corpus of Chinese fiction and historiography. The future framers of theories of literature that will truly be applicable on a universal scale will find it impossible to ignore the implications of some of his arguments. (Plaks 1977, xi)

Plaks expressed in explicit terms that he would work towards “the delineation of certain fundamental issues of Chinese narrative theory” (Plaks 1977, 309) and “a comprehensive critical theory for dealing with the Chinese narrative corpus.” (Plaks 1977, 309) He probed into Chinese and Western cultural traditions and pointed out that the non-appearance of epic poetry (such as in the standard “epic–romance–novel” sequence in Western literary history) and the predominance of historiography in the Chinese tradition might be factors that have shaped narrativity and fictionality into its unique form. Thus, the demarcation between Chinese and Western traditions in this regard is that

[...] historiography replaces epic among the Chinese narrative genres, providing not only a set of complex techniques of structuralization and

characterization, but also a conceptual model for the perception of significance within the outlines of human events. (Plaks 1977, 314)

While expounding differences arising out of the different traditions, Plaks also believed that the two sides share most of the basic narrative categories essentially because they both “represent human experience in terms of a more or less continuous succession of changing situations in time.” (Plaks 1977, 314) However, despite this shared priority of narrating successions of events, Chinese narrative fiction places considerable emphasis on “the interstitial spaces between events” (Plaks 1977, 315). For example, in traditional Chinese fiction, one always finds a thick matrix of non-events such as static description, set speeches, discursive digressions, and a host of other non-narrative elements. Based on the Chinese philosophical formulation of *yin* and *yang*, Plaks tried to explain Chinese fiction writers' taste for “non-events” by proposing a conceptual pair of narrative *stasis* and *praxis*. From this same theoretical basis, he tried to address Western queries of Chinese fiction being “loosely episodic” or lacking in “a certain degree of manifest artistic unity” (Plaks 1977, 329) by explicating its structural principles of “complementary bipolarity” and “multiple periodicity”, which can be particularly convincing as far as the reading of “masterworks” is concerned. In terms of characterization for example, Plaks defied E. M. Forster's division between “flat character” and “round character” (Forster, 1967) by pointing to a prevalent approach in Chinese fiction of presenting “composite characters”, which prioritizes the depiction of “groups and sets of figures, rather than concentrating on the delineation of the individual hero in isolation.” (Plaks 1977, 345) An ideal example would be *The Water Margin*, where literally 108 heroes each made his/her own way to the water margin as rebels against the central regime. With their journeys, stories, and destinies intertwined, about thirty-six of them are foregrounded through weightier depiction. On one hand, these foregrounded characters differ sharply from one another; on the other hand, as the most prominent in their respective “groups” or “composites”, they, together with the others, form “fields” of characters, within each of which the tension between identity and difference contributes greatly to the literary–aesthetic effect of overall characterization.

Plaks made good use of Chinese mythical tales and philosophy. For example, he re-examined tales centring on the marriage of NüWa⁴³ and Fu Xi⁴⁴ in a way similar to Vladimir Propp's examination of the morphology of Russian folktales. According to him, these tales are archetypal, pregnant with the thought of *yin-yang* and the “five-elements”. From these he derived the Chinese pattern of conceptualization and structuralization, which he termed “complementary bipolarity and multiple periodicity”, and he applied to the structural analysis of *Dream of the Red Chamber*. He also pointed out the ritualization or schematization of myth in Chinese life, which, he thought, has predominantly shaped the Chinese approach to narration. In addition to the issue of archetype, Plaks also compared allegory and allegorical interpretation in Chinese and Western literary traditions. He observed that, although there is a high degree of similarity between the two, their difference is one between practical and idealistic, this-worldly” and other-worldly, moving outward and moving upward, just as he tried to describe in

one conclusive remark: “He [The Chinese allegorist] strives for *extension* where his Western counterpart seeks elevation through *intension*.” (Plaks 1977, 125)

Plaks’s contribution to this research field has been tremendous, not only for his trail-blazing approach and an in-depth understanding of Chinese literary tradition, but more importantly for a vision that aspires for transcultural intelligibility through interillumination. Just as Jing Wang put it: “His venture into the Chinese critical canon points to a possible alternative—that of merging the systematic construction of a paradigm into the elusive and sensual experience of the text itself.”⁴⁵ However, we may also realize that, while dealing with all such macroscopic comparative issues, Plaks’s research has shelved the agenda for comparisons at the more concrete or systematic level, thus leaving considerable room for further research. Besides, out of the sheer expediency of theorization, some of the use he has made of the Chinese literary and philosophical tradition may still be open to question. Plaks himself was aware of this when he wrote: “we must apologize at the outset for the oversimplification necessarily involved in the enterprise.” (Wang 1989, 268)

On the Chinese side, the construction of a Chinese narratology is represented by Yang Yi, who viewed it from the perspective of cultural strategy. Yang stated his basic thinking as “restoration–reference–assimilation–integration” (Yang 2009, 36),⁴⁶ which means “returning to the original status of Chinese culture, referring to contemporary Western theories, bridging literary theories past and now, and integrating all to bring about innovation.” (Yang 2009, 36)⁴⁷ What can be felt from this statement, aside from an ambition, is a clear sense of eclecticism, further strengthened by his research principle of “neutralization of the two poles” (Yang 2009, 24–30).⁴⁸ Yang attempted to build Chinese narratology from five extensive aspects, namely: structure, time, perspective, idea–image, and critic–commentator⁴⁹. He approached each of the five aspects from the Chinese cultural tradition and compared it at appropriate points with Western narrative theory. For example, in “The Aspect of Structure” (Yang 2009, 37–124), Yang started from the “verbalness” of the Chinese word for “structure” and proposed what he called “the dynamics of structure” (结构动力学) for narrative research. He justified this proposal by relating it to its origin in Liu Xie’s *Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*:

[...] but in all cases the normative form (*ti*, 体) is set in accordance with the affective state (*qing*, 情); then according to the normative form, a momentum (*shi*, 势) is given. Momentum is formed by following the path of least resistance. (Owen 1992, 232)⁵⁰

With reference to Western narrative theory, he then generalized five themes in the historical development of structural form, particularly in the Chinese context, namely: formulaic creation, composite structure for works with epic features, the naturalistic turn, movement towards diversity, and the New Form featuring Chinese–Western alignment and integration; and he supported each classification with corresponding narrative works as examples. In “The Aspect of Perspective” (Yang 2009, 37–124), Yang revealed the skilful use of perspective as a narrative strategy in historiographical writings as early as the Spring and Autumn Period. He also examined the Ming critic–commentator

Jin Shengtan’s vivid analyses of the manipulation of perspectives in *The Water Margin* in relation to the achievement of aesthetic and psychological effect. Yang assimilated a series of Western terms, such as: omniscient, limited perspectives, fluidity of perspective, focalization and blind spot; and hewed out of them a distinction between “focalization on being” (*jujiaoyu you*, 聚焦于有) and “focalization on non-being” (*jujiaoyuwu*, 聚焦于无). He observed that “focalization on non-being” was also prominently used in traditional Chinese fiction. A well-known example is the narration of Liu Bei’s three visits to the thatched cottage of Zhuge Liang’s in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.⁵¹ The chief aim of narration in this part is to portray the unparalleled image and personality of the sagacious Zhuge Liang, which, however, stands out vividly from the pages well before focalization is placed onto him when Liu Bei and he finally meet. The fact here is that focalizations on others are perfectly to the service of the portrayal of Zhuge Liang, the man absent from view, from three recommendations at different circumstances by Liu Bei’s former advisors, to verses in the folk songs of local peasants labouring in the field, to encounters with his close friends and relatives on trips (the company he kept), to descriptions of landscape features and settings around his house, even to the temperament and speech manners of his page, and equally importantly, to Liu Bei’s perseverance and keen anticipation throughout the trips. The recommendations implied Zhuge Liang’s reputation in elite literati even as a hermit; the labouring peasants chanted songs expressing his worldview; the encounters with his close acquaintances formed a reflector or jigsaw of his possible personality; the views of chanting peasants in the field, artistic scenery and architecture in the vicinity of his house, the unworldly people along the way, merely convey one important message, that this man’s spiritual power has permeated the landscape, the air, and the livelihood of the areas around the Reposing Dragon’s Ridge.

Yang Yi’s *Chinese Narratology* is highly influential in the field of comparative narrative poetics in China because it marked “a theoretical revelation of a Chinese narratological world quite different from the West and unfamiliar to Western academia, as well as the preliminary establishment of narratological rationales of China’s own making.” (Yang 2009, 455)⁵² However, due to space limitations this dissertation shall not examine the other important issues covered by this work. All in all, in a way similar to Andrew Plaks’s research, Yang’s also appears to be strategic, or in other words, foundational. Although he delved deep into the core of Chinese narrative thought and tradition and attempted to uncover certain fundamental “cultural codes” accounting for differences with the West, he nevertheless scratched only the surface of a complex comparative agenda. This, together with what has been discussed above, about the other orientations or theorists, leaves us thinking what could be further done to consolidate and invigorate this growing field, and in a broader sense, what will become of the field of “narratologies”, or put differently, what kind of value needs to be built-in to keep the field healthily and sustainably productive.

So far as future research in comparative Chinese–Western narrative poetics is concerned, I would like to propose three likely growth points.

First, there needs to be a proper degree of “Chineseness” in studies of narratology. By “Chineseness”, what is meant is the focus should purely be cultural and intellectual, rather than anything unnecessarily nationalistic, let alone racist. Traditional Chinese narrative literature was generally created by Confucian literati whose “intent or aspiration” (*zhi*, 志), “literary sentiment” (*qing*, 情), and “intellectual talent” (*cai*, 才) might be incommensurably different from other traditions or civilizations. Take the so-called “cult of *qing*”⁵³ for example. It is something of a rare cultural subtlety and sophistication that was cumulatively shaped over the exceptionally profound poetical tradition, modified by its “rivers and mountains” landscape under the four distinct seasons, enhanced by the numerous dynastic changes and warfare that often meant death and diaspora of families. Without an adequate understanding of this “cult of *qing*”, the Western reader may face an enormous challenge reading Chinese fiction such as *Dream of the Red Chamber*. He may feel Daiyu’s burying fallen flower-petals just as absurd as the Chinese pursuit of family reunion at all costs.

Second, there needs to be in-depth comparisons of key narrative concepts, notions and techniques. As discussed above, for all the existing narratological research that falls into the categories of “borrowing a foreign mirror”, “polishing the Chinese mirror”, or “lighting a lamp for interillumination”, few have set about a systematic comparative agenda at the relative microscopic level. There always seems to exist in such research certain lacuna or deficiencies even for scholars like Zhang Shijun who did explore in this fashion, because they may not be equally interested in Western narratology as they might be in Chinese narrative thought.

Third there needs to be more research into the philosophical and cultural underpinnings that have accounted for both the commonality and the incommensurability between Chinese narrative poetics and Western narrative theory. There are already research results of this kind in the broader denomination of comparative poetics, notably Zhang Longxi’s *The Tao and the Logos: Literary Hermeneutics, East and West*, and Yu Hong’s *Chinese Literary Theory and Western Poetics*. Building on the findings of these works, more research still needs to be done that focuses specifically on the philosophical values and cultural codes embedded in narrative between China and the West.

FUSION OF HORIZONS, OR CONCORDIA DISCORDS?

Having closely examined the state of the art, we naturally come to a point of looking into the future, where deliberating on values is hardly avoidable. In fact, still applicable are the research pursuits that Haskell Block once proposed for comparative literature: “rapports de fait” and “rapports de valeur”. (Block 1970, 47). It is fair to say that any comparative studies handle, transmit and reproduce values, which sometimes can be discordant or even conflicting with each other. For a measured envisioning of the comparative enterprise based on an evaluation of the history, reality and trends of theories, I would like to invoke two notions which may be relevant to the present

concern: one is the “fusion of horizons” first articulated by Hans-Georg Gadamer and the other is the ancient Horatian notion of *concordiadiscors* (discordant harmony).

After being raised by Gadamer, the idea of “fusion of horizons” has been advocated by numerous comparatists as a guiding principle. In the field of comparative poetics, for example, Zhang Longxi “argue[d] for the fusion of horizons in the study of literature” (Zhang, 1989), which echoed with James J. Y. Liu’s proposed method of “drawing on philosophical hermeneutics, contemporary literary theory, and traditional Chinese poetics” (Liu 1975, 2). Other comparatists, though not using the same terminology, have voiced in different forms their support for the universality of theory. For example, comparative literary theorist James J. Y. Liu declared at the very beginning of his *Chinese Theories of Literature* that “The first and ultimate one [goal] is to contribute to an eventual universal theory of literature ...” (Liu 1975, 2) As if vigilant of risking being too assertive, Liu not only moderated his tone with the determiners of “ultimate” and “eventual”, but also added the eclectic remark that “a comparative study of theories of literature may lead to a better understanding of all literature.” (Liu 1975, 2)

In fact, while dialogue or “interillumination” is definitely possible, “fusion of horizons” may be an ideal too lofty to attain for many cross-cultural undertakings, particularly comparative literature or poetics, which rely so overwhelmingly on traditions. Indiscriminate use of this notion might also abuse the true intention of Gadamer, who invoked it in a sense that is more neutral than artificial to describe the relationship between the past and the present in forming a larger context of meaning for the process of understanding. Just as Gadamer himself explained: “In a tradition this process of fusion is continually going on, for the old and new are always combining into something of living value, without either being explicitly foregrounded from the other.” (Gadamer 2004, 305) Another problem with “fusion of horizons” in the present context is its huge vagueness, which has left in the dark the actual means to achieve it as well as the cultural–political factors it will necessitate.

Reflections on the future of this field of comparative studies and on the notion of “fusion of horizons” direct me to another value encapsulated in the ancient Horatian notion of *concordiadiscors*. Originally found in Horace’s twelfth epistle “to describe Empedocles’ philosophy that the world is explained and shaped by a perpetual strife between the four elements, ordered by love into a jarring unity” (Gordon, 2007), the notion has generally been understood as the state of discordant harmony or a pleasing balance of opposites. Samuel Johnson, in a reference to marriage, defined *concordiadiscors* as “that suitable disagreement which is always necessary to intellectual harmony,” (Johnson, 1801, 43)) which extends its explanatory power specifically to the intellectual sphere. As is mentioned, “fusion of horizons” may necessitate certain cultural–political factors. In other words, its lofty romanticism may have concealed its sense of cultural clashes or ideological violence. Take narratology for example. Its modern development in the West has led to the marginalization or obliteration of other narrative theories and practices. Consequently, fusion of horizons in such a way is more or less illusory and not good for the continued growth of narratology, especially when it is subject to unprecedented challenges. By contrast, the

idea of *concordiadiscors* places emphasis on harmony while recognizing the existence of discord. The word *concordia* has retained the positive elements or the ultimate goal of *fusionofhorizons* but moderated its force, while *discors* substituted diversity for the monotony as implied in *fusion of horizons*. Comparatively, *concordiadiscors* also coincides with the Confucian idea of “harmony in diversity” (*he erbutong*, 和而不同) and “seeking common ground while reserving differences” (*qiutongcunyi*, 求同存异). In a word, given the diversity of, and the tension of opposites between, theories and traditions, the oxymoronic notion of *concordiadiscors* might be more conducive to the consolidation and diversification of narratology as an academic discipline.

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Notes

1. The author conducted PhD research at the College of Foreign Languages of Beijing Language and Culture University and the Faculty of Arts of Macquarie University under the joint supervision of Professor NingYizhong and Professor Nick Mansfield from September 2010 to June 2014. This article is part of the Introduction to his PhD dissertation.
2. Aware of the fact that there is already a well-developed narrative *theory*, or narratology, in the West, and the fact that there was only a scattered distribution of narrative *thought* over a vast body of critical discourse in pre-modern China, this article has used the word *poetics* in a general sense to accommodate the two objects in comparison.
3. As implied in Shakespeare’s *Sonnet 18*, “Nor shall Death brag thou wanderest in his shade, When in eternal lines to time thou growest: So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see, So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.”
4. In his essay *Of Studies*, Sir Francis Bacon wrote, “If he be not apt to beat over matters, and to call up one thing to prove and illustrate another, let him study the lawyers’ cases.”
5. There are hypotheses about social life and human destiny at different levels. For example, in terms of “power and order”, there is one that believes, “the Empire, long divided, must unite; long united, must divide.”, as in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *The Water Margin*; in terms of “ethical codes”, there are those that either advise, “within the Four Seas, all men are brothers.”, as in *The Water Margin*, or warn, “Karmic retribution is swift and certain.” or “the four evils of wine, women, wealth and wrath” (disputable this may be by today’s standards), as in *The Water Margin* and *The Plum in the Golden Vase*; in terms of the “ultimate truth or vanity of human life”, there is the epigram in the *Dream of the Red Chamber* that “Truth becomes fiction when the fiction’s true; Real becomes not-real where the unreal’s real.”.
6. This unique tradition of authoring—and, correspondingly, interpreting—literary and historiographical works is famously known as the “technique of the *Chunqiu*” or the “diction of the *Chunqiu*”. It is generally believed that, when compiling the *Chunqiu*, translated as the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, Confucius was very deliberate and skilful in

his marshalling of language as well as its proportions in order to transmit subtly his moral message and historical evaluations.

7. An equivalent for *qishu*, 奇書, in Chinese.
8. An equivalent for *caizishu*, 才子書, in Chinese.
9. The notion of “literary mind” (*wenxin*, 文心) was first raised by Chinese literary theorist Liu Xie (465–520) in his 50-chaptered theoretical masterpiece *Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* (*Wenxindiaolong*, 文心雕龙).
10. While bringing the benefits of literary imagination, such bifurcation also risks running wild under special circumstances. Chinese literary history has a series of heavy lessons to offer, from the intellectual disaster in the Qin Dynasty (221–207 BCE) when “books were burnt and Confucian scholars were buried alive” to the height of “literary inquisition” in the Manchurian-ruled Qing Dynasty (1636–1912), to the unchecked literary censorship and persecution during the “Cultural Revolution” (1966–1976).
11. M. H. Abrams used the two metaphors for the title of his seminal work *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*, alluding to William Butler Yeats’s line “the mirror turn lamp”. In Chinese Buddhism, the “lamp” signifies “a superb wisdom illuminating the life journey of sentient beings.
12. English translation by myself.
13. Zhang, Yinde, *Studies in Narratology* (叙述学研究), Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 1989.
14. The collection focused on important works in Western literary theory, poetics, aesthetics, and linguistics and was published by the China Social Sciences Press and the Baihua Art and Literature Publishing House in 1990.
15. The six-volume series is a component unit of the “Weiming Library of Translations” (未名译库) published by the Peking University Press in 2007. It includes the Chinese versions of *Reading Narrative* by Joseph Hillis Miller, *Narratologies* by David Herman, *A Companion to Narrative Theory* by James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz, *Narrative as Rhetoric* by James Phelan, *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice* by Susan Lanser, and *Postmodern Narrative Theory* by Mark Currie.
16. Luo, Gang, *An Introduction to Narratology* (叙事学导论), Kunming: Yunnan People’s Publishing House, 1994.
17. Shen, Dan, *Narratology and the Stylistics of Fiction* (叙述学与小说 文体学研究), Beijing: Peking university Press, 1998.
18. Shen, Dan, Han Jiaming, Wang Liya, *Studies on Narrative Theories in Anglo-American Novels* (英美小说 叙事理论研究), Beijing: Peking University Press, 2005.
19. Dong, Xiaoying, *Metalinguistics: The Principle of Narratology and Understanding* (超语言学：叙事学的学理及理解的原理), Tianjin: Baihua Art and Literature Publishing House, 2008.
20. Nie, Qingpu, *Cyber Narratology* (网络叙事学), Beijing: China Federation of Literary and Art Circles Publishing Corporation, 2004.

21. Zhao, Yiheng, *When Narrator is Narrated: Introduction to Comparative Narratology* (当说者被说的时候：比较叙事学导论), Beijing: Renmin University Press, 1998.
22. Accessed on February 22, 2013. China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) is a system of academic databases for nationwide knowledge-sharing.
23. Cao Pi (187–226), the elder son of the great statesman and strategist Cao Cao, was a leading man of letters and founding emperor of Wei in the Three Kingdoms Period (220–280). Theselected essay, *Discourse on Literature*, is a chapter from his *Authoritative Discourses* (典论).
24. Lu Ji (261–303) was a celebrity of among the literati of the Western Jin Period (266–316).
25. Liu Xie (465–520) was a renowned literary theorist of the Northern and Southern Dynasties Period (420–589). With *Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, the fifty-chapter comprehensive thesis on literature, he is generally considered one of the best-accomplished literary theorists of ancient China.
26. 气, *qi*, sometimes translated into “pneuma”, is a fundamental concept in Chinese philosophy and has strongly influenced the traditional Chinese world view.
27. Owen, Stephen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992, p. 65. “文以气为主。气之清浊有体。”
28. 体, *ti*, is a very discursive term flexibly used for the reference of “form”, “style”, “genre”, or “structure”, depending on the specific context.
29. See fn 29.
30. Owen, Stephen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992, p. 68. “盖文章经国之大业，不朽之盛事。”
31. Namely, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *The Water Margin*, *The Journey to the West*, and *The Plum in the Golden Vase*.
32. It is widely believed that different from Western fiction, which evolved from epic and romance stories, Chinese fiction came into being with the influence of historiography on the one hand and “street talk and popular gossip” on the other.
33. The famous Ming critic has designated six books of genius which he would determine to comment on. *The Fifth Book of Genius* refers to *The Water Margin*.
34. Chen, Pingyuan, *Shifts in the Narrative Mode of Chinese Fiction* (中国小说叙事模式的转变), Shanghai: Shanghai People’s Publishing House, 1988.
35. Wang, Ping, *Traditional Chinese Fiction: A Narratological Perspective* (中国古代小说叙事研究), Shijiazhuang: Hebei People’s Publishing House, 2001.
36. Translation by myself.
37. Fu, Xiuyan, *Studies on Pre-Qin Narrative: The Formation of Chinese Narrative Tradition* (先秦叙事研究：关于中国叙事传统的形成), Beijing: China Eastern press, 1999.
38. The three volumes are: 1. Xiong, Jiangmei, *Narrative Thought of the Pre-Qin Period and the Western Han and Eastern Han Dynasties* (先秦两汉叙事思想), Changsha: Hunan Normal University Press, 2010; 2. Li, Zuolin, *Narrative Thought from the Wei and Jin Dynasties to the Song and Yuan Dynasties* (魏晋至宋元叙事思想), Changsha: Hunan Normal University Press, 2011; 3. Zhao, Yanqiu, *Narrative Thought from the Ming and Qing*

Dynasties to the Modern Era (明清近代叙事思想), Changsha: Hunan Normal University Press, 2011.

39. The Pre-Qin Period is a general reference for the long period before the First Emperor of Qin unified China in BCE 221. It was a period of rival kingdoms and great thinkers.
40. Lin, Gang, *Studies on Fiction Commentary of the Ming and Qing Dynasties* (明清之际小说评点学之研究), Beijing: Peking University Press, 1999.
41. Zhang, Shijun, *Narrative Concepts in Ming-Qing Fiction Commentary* (明清小说评点叙事概念研究), Beijing: China Social Sciences Publishing House, 2007.
42. Yang, Yi, *Chinese Narratology* (中国叙事学), Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2009.
43. The goddess in Chinese mythology who created mankind with clay and repaired heaven with many-coloured stones.
44. Husband of NüWa, first of the three sovereigns of ancient China, inventor of the *bagua* trigrams from which the hexagrams of the *I Ching* are derived.
45. “还原 — 参照 — 贯通 — 融合”. English translation by myself.
46. “返回中国文化的原点, 参照西方现代理论, 贯通古今文史, 融合以创造新的学理”. English translation by myself.
47. “两极中和”. English translation by myself.
48. “Critic-commentator” is my own translation for the Chinese *pingdianjia*, 评点家. In ancient China, it was typical for an established man of letters to publish his critical commentary as a system of meta-texts symbiotic with the novel itself.
49. The Chinese original is “莫因散体, 即体势也 著, 乘御辨也”
50. Liu Bei, the later-to-be Emperor of the Kingdom of Shu, was in dire need of a military counselor after a series of defeats. After being recommended with Zhuge Liang, the reclusive scholar and strategist, Liu Bei decided to pay him a visit at the latter's thatched cottage in the Reposing Dragon's Ridge. Accompanied by Guan Yu and Zhang Fei, his sworn brothers and top combat generals, he made light of the difficult trip thrice and finally met Zhuge Liang and persuaded the latter to assist him. This story, narrated across Chapters 36, 37 and 38 of the novel, has since become a popular Chinese idiom: *sangumaolu* (三顾茅庐).
51. Recommendation remark by Qian Zhongwen, renowned Professor and literary theorist in China, prolific author on literature and literary theory, chief editor of the seven-volumed Chinese version of *Complete Works of M. M. Bakhtin*. The original: “从理上示了不同西方于西方学者甚 陌生的中国叙事学世界, 初 建立了我国自己的叙事学原理”. English translation by myself.
52. Scholars of Chinese literature can duly realize that the Chinese character “*qing*, 情” defies equivalent in almost all Indo-European languages. It is neither the same as “emotion”, “sentiment”, “feeling”, nor “love”.

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Searching for Cosmic Signs in the Real: A Baudrillardian Interpretation of J.M.G. Le Clézio's *L'Inconnu sur la Terre*

KEITH MOSER

Articulating similar concerns as Jean Baudrillard, the Franco-Mauritian writer's fiction asserts that the real treasure that we should valorize is life itself, as opposed to a distorted, symbolic representation of it. Le Clézio compels the reader to embrace concrete reality once again and to dismiss artificial images that have been carefully manufactured for the sole purpose of generating revenue. Given the ubiquitous nature of the simulations that incessantly bombard our television, computer, Iphone, Ipad, Ipod, and smart phone screens, Maurice Cagnon notes that a salient feature of the author's diverse *œuvre* is to help liberate contemporary man that is "coping with the separation of the self from 'le réel'" (227). Although many scholars have mentioned the intertextual relationship between Baudrillard and Le Clézio in passing, this subject merits a more systematic investigation.² This brief exploration represents a point of departure that will hopefully encourage other colleagues to delve further into the nuances of these intertextual connections.

Heavily influenced by Amerindian thought, *L'Inconnu sur la terre* is a complex work that resists simplistic categorization. On the back cover of the Gallimard edition, the author reveals, "Cecin'est pas tout à fait un essai [...] C'est une longue histoire, qui pourrait être celle d'un oiseau, celle d'un poisson et celle d'un arbre [...] Ceci est peut-être aussi, tout simplement, l'histoire d'un petit garçon qui se promène au hasard sur la terre" (n.p.). Despite the fact that the writer blends several different genres in this experimental narrative by his own admission, *L'Inconnu sur la terre* could merely be described as the story of the aimless wanderings of a young boy "who has no name nor history" (Ridon 717). This enigmatic child is sensitive to the beauty of the physical universe to which he is inextricably linked. However, the unidentified protagonist's fascination with the inner workings of the cosmos should not be interpreted as an effort to escape mundane reality.

Highlighting that the adventures of the mysterious boy from *L'Inconnu sur la terre* are emblematic of a deep yearning to (re)-attach oneself to fundamental ecological realities from which the human race has become progressively detached, Cynthia Ruoff explains, "In retaliation against today's society which attempts to dominate

nature, the narrator/author embarks on an exploratory journey, the creative process through which he searches for the real" (133). Ruoff further elucidates, "the text invites the reader to join the narrator/author, identified with the unknown boy of the title [...] to make contact with the real" (133). Drawing a similar conclusion as Ruoff, Claude Cavallero asserts that both *Le Chercheur d'or* and *L'Inconnu sur la terre* are "roman(s) initiatique(s)" that incessantly delve into universal laws which govern the existence of every organism on this planet including human beings (37). Instead of being indicative of a flight from quotidian reality, *L'Inconnu sur la terre* urges the alienated modern subject to free himself from all of the simulated artifice that concretizes much of our daily existence. Directly revealing the importance of his artistic project itself, the author/narrator adamantly maintains, "Ce sont les choses qui se passent réellement, ici" (142).

Beckoning the reader to examine the sterility of our fully-mediated, hyper-real environments more critically, the author/narrator declares, "Mais ce n'est pas la vie qui vous traverse ainsi. C'est une frénésie de l'esprit, nourrie des mots du langage des promesses du logos [...] Il n'y a rien d'autre que l'évidence que vous sentez, rien d'autre de ce que vous sentez, rien d'autre que ce que vous voyez" (161). Similar to Baudrillard, Le Clézio insists that happiness will elude us if we continue to search for fulfillment and self-actualization in seductive, commercial signs (Frank 215). Moreover, the author affirms that these enticing images of contentment and existential meaning that surround us everywhere we go are far removed from concrete reality. When a client acquires a given item, he or she is actually attempting to purchase a pre-fabricated vision³ of what it means to live the good(s) life. Whereas earlier Leclézian protagonists such as Bea B. and Tranquilité do not appear to find any lasting solace from the empty promises of the alluring simulacra that incessantly bombard them, the young boy from *L'Inconnu sur la terre* possesses an insatiable thirst for life. This enigmatic child has yet to be entirely consumed by the "signs of happiness" that are unable to deliver on their lofty guarantees given that these chimerical simulations only exist in the realm of symbolic representation (Frank 215). The narrator's progressive transformation into a fully-automated consumption machine that impulsively buys a steady stream of gadgets in a misguided attempt to maximize happiness is not yet complete. In this experimental narrative, the Franco-Mauritian author seems to be more cautiously optimistic about the future of humanity in comparison to the earlier aforementioned texts. Perhaps, the remedy for the ontological anguish and cosmic disconnection experienced by numerous Leclézian protagonists is to make a concerted effort to (re)-establish contact with material reality itself.

Decrying the simulated life of opulence lauded by the mainstream media and underscoring the inability of manipulative signs to fulfill genuine human needs that cannot be procured in a shopping mall, Baudrillard elucidates, "Le miraculé de la consommation lui aussi met en place tout un dispositif d'objets simulacres, de signes caractéristiques du bonheur, et attend ensuite [...] que le bonheur se pose [...] L'opulence, l'affluence n'est en effet que l'accumulation des signes du bonheur"

(27).According to the simplistic ideology of consumerism, an automatic correlation exists between the acquisition of material possessions and inner contentment. However, unfortunately for consumers, the seductive image that they desperately long to live has little connection to the actual product itself. After the unmitigated failure of these commercial simulacra to render the customer happy, the modern subject has nowhere to turn given the pervasive nature of the signs that follow him everywhere. In other words, Le Clézio and Baudrillard wonder if any meaningful distinction between public and private space still exists. Since simulations of the real including their hidden, dubious intentions are constantly being transmitted to us by a proliferation of digital screens at home, work, and school, is our problematic “search for happiness” doomed to inhabit the same artificial space as everything else in our symbolic world of representations (Cederman 20)? Is there any “reality outside the image” deconstructed by Le Clézio and Baudrillard (Mannathukkaren 419)?

In his seminal essay *La Société de Consommation*, Baudrillard suggests that we have arrived at a critical juncture in global society in which “la consommationsaisittoute la vie [...] oùl’environnementest total, totalementclimatisé, aménagé, culturalisé” (23). Le Clézio clearly appears to share these same concerns regarding the hyper-real environments in which every image of happiness is carefully packaged and disseminated to us. Yet, *L’Inconnusur la terre* provides a faint glimmer of hope that we might one day be able to transcend the realm of simulacra in order to experience true contentment once again. Although it is easier said than done because of the omnipresence of the nefarious signs that endlessly transmit the same message (i.e. ‘thou shalt consume’), Le Clézio contends that if we can momentarily “quitter les refuges et les chambres closes” happiness is still possible (13).

Instead of spending our entire day immersed in simulations of the real despondently trying to emulate a pre-existing model of success and self-actualization, the Franco-Mauritian author encourages the reader to (re)-connect with material reality. This fusion⁴ can only take place if we temporarily eliminate all of the obstacles that society has erected which prevent us from having a primordial understanding of the physical realities of the universe to which we belong. As the author/narratorexplains, “Je voudrais qu’il n’y ait pas de différence entre les éléments et les hommes, entre la terre, le ciel, la mer et les hommes [...] Ce qui sépare les hommes du monde réel va disparaître, toutes les vitres, tous les murs, enfin le monde va venir” (142-143). For Le Clézio, it is impossible to begin to understand the complexity of material reality in complete isolation from it. Furthermore, how can we comprehend our small place in the cosmic mystery that encapsulates us and of which we are a small part if we never leave the confines of the hyper-real?

In conclusion, Le Clézio juxtaposes the authentic search for “les signesréels de la vie” with the narcissistic desire to accumulate signs of happiness in *L’Inconnusur la terre* (325). In an affirmation whichcloselyresemblesBaudrillard’s assertion that “c’est nous qui sommes devenus l’excrément de l’argent” (245), the author/narrator of *L’Inconnusur la terre* confesses, “Je veux écrire [...] pour que les mots ne soient plus

les esclaves de l’argent” (387). In a society in which everythinghas been reduced to a mere object of consumption that generates colossal profits for transnational behemoths, Le Clézio and Baudrillard attempt to restore human dignity. Both authors urge the modern subject to embrace reality once again as opposed to a simulation of it. Although it is becoming increasingly difficult to find a space that is free from the taint of the enticing simulacra that incessantly illuminate our myriad of screens, Baudrillard and Le Clézio compellingly assert that the stakes of living in the hyper-real are far too great to fall on deaf ears.

Notes

1. See, Thibault, Bruno. *J.M.G. Le Clézio et La Métaphore Exotique*. New York :Rodopi, 2009, pp. 19-25. ; Walker, David.*Consumer Chronicles: Cultures of Consumption in Modern French Literature*. Liverpool: LiverpoolUniversity Press, 2011.; and McIlwaine, Geraldine. “The Threat of the Urban Space in Three Novels by Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio.” *Threat: Essays in French Literature, Thought and Visual Culture*. Eds. Georgina Evans and Adam Kay. Oxford, England: Peter Lang, 2010: 125-139.
2. In two separate publications (*The Fiction of J.M.G. Le Clézio: A Postcolonial Reading*. New York: PeterLang, 2012; *Le Clézio: Le Procès-verbal*. Glasgow Introductory Guides to French Literature 51. Glasgow: University of Glasgow French and German Publications, 2005.), Bronwen Martin underscores that Le Clézio and Baudrillard’s fears regarding consumer culture, hyper-reality, and alienation are quite similar. Martin also notes that Le Clézio’s concerns predate those of Baudrillard. Nonetheless, Martin only dedicates a few lines of her aforementioned critical works to exploring these intertextual links.
3. In *La Société de Consommation*, Baudrillard explains that consumers are indoctrinated from birth to identify with pre-existing models that have been created for them. Even forms of ‘resistance’ have been carefully embedded into the code. If an individual wishes to express ‘anti-establishment’ sentiments, he or she dresses and talks in a certain fashion.
4. Numerous Le Clézio scholars such as Hervé Lambert, Marguerite Le Clézio, and Jens Olivier Müller have delved into the nuances of the metaphor of fusion in the author’s diverse writings. See Lambert, Hervé. “Fuite et nostalgie des origines.” *Sud* 85-86 : 85-94; Le Clézio, Marguerite. Le Clézio, Marguerite. “L’Etre sujet/objet: La vision active et passive chez Le Clézio.” *Ethiqueet esthétique dans la littérature française du XXe siècle*. Ed. Maurice Cagnon. Saratoga,CA: AnmaLibri, 1978 : 113-121; and Müller, Jens Olivier. “L’Exotisme intérieur dans *Désert* et *Le Chercheur d’or* de J.M.G. LeClézio.” *Lendemain* 24(95-96): 32-46.

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Time in Autobiographical Fiction: A Note on Maitreyi Devi

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Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past,
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable....

T.S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton"

Historical events must be accurate as far as possible. Past has come back... and welcomes me to its world of beatitude, entering where all my suffering and anguish vanish, and I experience the eternal presence of the past....

Maitreyi Devi, *Close to the Heaven*

In autobiographical fiction linearity of time is a fiction. Narrative is not a concept of the present, but a continuity of the past to the eternity of presence. Maitreyi Devi asserts her views whereas Eliot subjoins his statement. Devi characterizes her view of time in autobiography:

No, I am not talking of another life it is not past life it happened only the other day-only forty-two years ago. I have stepped forty-two years backwards. For us human beings it is a long period, but how small it is in eternity! Time is not anchored anywhere... Time wipes away all that was once precious. It is a destroyer, it shatters and wears out everything old? Does it not also make any thing new? Yes, my body is old, but my mind? The mind that's eager for news of Mercea Euclid now is young. It too is a creation of time... what was old could become new, or that the conception of old and new itself is an illusion. (IDD, pp.10-11)

Devi's idea of time is fully modelled upon the Indian classification of time as human (*mānuṣa*) and divine (*divya*) whereas Eliot's subjunctive expression manifests his unwillingness to accept this concept of time wholesomely Devi's dedication of the

book to "Mahakal" (The Great Time that continues unendingly or eternally) suggests the central point of her thesis that the time she deals with in her autobiography is not historical, recording some particular events that happened in different points of the life she lived phenomenally. She further elaborates this point in ruminating her memory of Eliade. Reclining in a large arm chair she was completely immersed in an hallucination while the telephone was going on ringing, and suddenly regained her consciousness as her son awaked her. She writes:

My body certainly remained here in this chair, but I entered *Mahakala*, infinite time, time that had no beginning, no end – to that point where the sun does not shine and stars are not seen. This separation of body and soul, to be present at two different points in time simultaneously, hurts physically (IDD, p.40-41)

The time she describes is not actual but fictional, and it is this fictionality of time that elevates it into the status of myth, and it is here that she stands with Mircea Eliade her counterpart. Eliade interpreted his life, as he would interpret all human life as mythological in character. This mythological thrust to human life is the foundation of Eliade's New Humanism.

Although Devi does not share Eliade's humanism, both of them reject bare realism. Existence itself is a spiritual entity, and this cosmic spirituality is to be experienced not in fragments, but in its wholeness, a message that Lord Krishna has preached in the *Bhagvadgītā* (11th Chap.). A common man experiences time in fragments, in its linear form, but a man with a spiritual vision (*divya dṛṣṭi*) perceives it as a whole, and this "Whole" is a fiction where all historical sequences are meaningless in losing their individual identity. In this view autobiography is not a personal diary, an account of the events that actually happened in the course of life that the writer lived.

As already quoted earlier, old and new are illusory conceptions, viewed in the light of times' deconstructive power. Time destroys the past, but the past does not grow old as it is recreated anew. Man's consciousness (may it be called mind, soul or spirit) is not a victim of time's linear movement as is the phenomenal world. But again, for a creative man this phenomenal world escapes this linearity of time, as he experiences time's deconstructive power. Devi quotes a poem that she wrote in her young days:

The time that was behind
Comes in front,
her face unveiled, wearing star studded silk,
Who gave her dress and ornaments?
How comes the show of this temporary wealth?
In the touchless flow of time
in its formless motion
Who grows flowers?
Forms take shape every moment
From the ocean of emptiness
and fall on the shoreless shore
Waves break in an illusion of death. (IDD, p.11)

All this is applicable to autobiography as a fictional narrative not to autobiography as such. Devi narrates the events not chronologically, but in flashback, depicting time in a reversal order:

1st September 1972. My birthday, my dear friends, Gautami and Parbati – you were the ones so keen to celebrate it, but you never knew that this evening, in the middle of the music, recitations and laughter in the room, I was constantly drifting away. The tide of time was turbulent, it touched me and carried me away not forward, towards the future, but backward – deep into the past.

(The starting paragraph *IDD*.)

Compare the starting paragraph of Mircea Eliade's *Autobiography*, Vol.I.

I was born in Bucharest on March 9, 1907, My brother Nicolaie ("Nicu") had been born the year before, and my sister cornellia ("Corina") came four years later. Father was a Moldavian from Tecuei. Born Ieremia, he had changed his name to Eliade....

But in his novel *Bengal Nights* based on his experience during his stay in Calcutta (1928-31), particularly his meeting and relationship with Maitreyi Devi, there is a vague reference to time:

If I hesitate in beginning, it is because I still have not managed to remember the exact date of my first meeting with Maitreyi. I have not found anything in my notes of that year. Her name does not appear until very much later – until after I had left the Sanatorium and was living with Narendra Sen in Bhawanipore. But that was in 1929 and I had already seen Maitreyi, at least ten months earlier. As I begin, I feel somewhat pained that I cannot evoke an image of her at that time or re-live the surprise, uncertainty or confusion that I experienced at our first meetings.

Time is deliberately kept uncertain for fictionalizing the autobiographical facts and events as Eliade's intention is to offer his readers a narrative charged with erotic passion meant for entertainment. Devi raises objections against such fictionalization, if at all the fiction is autobiographical which the novel is apparently so. She charges Mircea for writing that Maitreyi was visiting him at nights:

Why did you not write the truth Mircea? Was not truth enough?

Did you write for financial gain? Yes you did – that is the way of the West- books sell if they deal with lost, not love. I am ready to accept the truth, but why should I accept the burden of a lie?"

Truth in fiction is an issue of grand debate in contemporary theory. But the point that Devi refers to is that autobiographical fiction should not distort the actual, although the functionality of the actual be effected by subverting the historicity of time. Historical truth must be presented not in the linearity of time, but in its transformation as effected by the Grand Time – *Mahakal*. Eliade's narrative obviously misses the philosophical insight that Devi exercises in treating time in autobiographical fiction.

Notes

Maitreyi Devi (1914-1991), daughter of the legendary Indian philosopher Surendranath Dasgupta was an intellectual disciple of Rabindranath Tagore. She studied philosophy, literature, wrote poems in both Bengali and English, was also a lecturer for some time- travelling widely over the globe. A prestigious lady with a happy life.

At the age of sixteen she was introduced to Mireca Eliade, a Romanian young man, then twenty-three years old who came to India for studying Indian philosophy under the supervision of Professor Dasgupta. Their acquaintance grow up to an emotional attachment that was destined to discontinue because of cultural difference, colonial arrogance, and particularly Professor Dasgupta's interference. On going back to Romania Eliade published a novel titled *Maitreyi* (1933) a fictional account of his stay in Calcutta (1928-31) with references to his association with Dasgupta and his daughter. The real events, however, could be traced in Eliade's *Autobiography* Vol.I, with particular reference to Maitreyi, pp.184-186, that clearly indicates Eliade's one-sided love for her. Eliade writes:

I did not realize that, in spite of myself, I was already in love. I say in spite of myself because I thought the whole family was conspiring to cause us to be together as much as possible, and this suspicion put me on the defensive.

But, although I believed I was beginning to know the Indian soul, I was mistaken. There was no such conspiracy. It is probable that Dasgupta had something entirely different in mind namely to introduce me into his family by a kind of "adoption".

The Romanian novel *Maitreyi* was translated into French titled *Les nuits Bengali*. *Bengal Nights* was published in 1993. In reaction to Eliade's distortion of truth in his fictional representation of the historical events and facts related to his association with her Devi published an autobiographical fiction in Bengali titled *Na Hanyate* in 1974 an English translation of which was published in Calcutta, 1976 (reprinted 1992, its offset by Chicago University Press, 1994.)

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The Metaphysics of Pain:

Troubadours, Catharism, Buddhism and John Keats

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The metaphysics of pain in the West is fore-grounded upon the doctrine of dualism as expounded in Platonism, Gnosticism, Manichaeism, Catharism and Kantian thought. There is no denying the fact that the Western sensibility is essentially dualistic, and right from the early Greek philosophy of Heraclitus, Empedocles and Pythagoras down to Plato, St. Augustine and Kantian aesthetics, the duality between 'being' and 'becoming' (Heraclitus), 'harmony' and 'discord' (Empedocles), real and ideal (Plato), flesh and spirit, 'city of God' and 'city of man' (St. Augustine) constitute the core of Western thought. While subscribing to the dualistic theory, the Greek philosophers emphasize the fact that the whole world is flux, and that change and mutability characterize our existence (Stace: 44-74; Burnet: 51-55). Everything being transitory by nature, and permanence being a far cry in the world of mutability, pain and suffering are caused by separation and frustration, non-fulfillment of desires and, more predominantly, by the realization of the transience of life. While emphasizing the dichotomy between good and bad Eros in *Symposium* (180c-185c), Plato in fact points to the eternal clash between the ideal and the real. His idea is more forcefully pronounced in *Phaedrus* (244-265b) wherein he states that temporary allurements of a beautiful body creates dissatisfaction the moment one realizes that the world of sense perception is essentially mutable (Taylor: 51).

In the Oriental tradition, on the other hand, Buddhism enjoins that life is essentially full of misery and suffering (*dukkha*). Though Buddha didn't speak specifically about any metaphysical doctrine of sin, he located the cause of suffering and pain in the ignorant craving (*avidyā*) precisely because it is ignorance about the ultimate Reality that causes all suffering. The Buddhist concept of suffering and pain can be correlated with the cult of pain professed by Catharism and the aesthetics of Troubadours, the court poets of mediaeval France who professed the art of *amor courtis* (courtly love) grounded upon the aesthetics of separation and suffering. Troubadour concept of love is essentially an ever-increasing desire fomented by suffering in separation and as such its philosophy is fore-grounded upon dualism that rejects physical pleasure and possession of the object of love. The romantic aesthetics of pain in the West is philosophically built upon the Platonic and Troubadourian

aesthetics on the one hand, and can be negotiated with the Buddhist concept of pleasure and pain on the other. In the backdrop of the above discussion on duality, the poetry of the English romantic poet John Keats can be revisited in the light of the Buddhist and Troubadourian aesthetics of delight and pain with special emphasis on his *Odes* and the *Fall of Hyperion*.

I

Buddhism, like *Sāṅkhya* system of Indian philosophy, characterizes life in terms of impermanence and suffering (*dukkha*). Buddhism comes closer to Catharism in this regard. The Cathar philosophy developed between 12th and 14th century in Southern France is grounded upon the doctrine of dualism – one that forwards the argument that the visible world is created by the Evil and that the path of liberation is shown by the benevolent God to soul already enmeshed by Satan in the body. The Cathars know, like Buddhists, fairly well that the beautiful things and objects of the visible world cause suffering and pain precisely because they are transitory and more particularly bear the stamp of their evil creator. The Cathars, often acclaimed as Christian dualists contesting Roman Catholic Church, are called Buddhists of the West. They subscribe to the Buddhist thought of impermanence (*anicca*), insubstantiality (*anatta*), illumination and enlightenment. To both Buddhists and Cathars, life is flux, and whatever rises must have a fall thereby vindicating the very fundamental fact that existence is an unending process of rise, growth, decay, dissolution and death. In this sense, our existence is an unending cycle of growth and decay, integration and disintegration. While emphasizing the frailty and insecurity of life, Buddhism further enjoins that there is a void at the center of existence which is a result of the insubstantial nature of life. The Cathars are called Buddhists insofar as they share with Buddhism the thought that life is full of suffering, and that desire is the cause of all sufferings. It is the problem of suffering that prompted both Buddhists and Cathars to go in quest of enlightenment (*nibbāna*).

While emphasizing the dichotomy between integration and disintegration, Buddha's first sermon proclaims that ours is a world where birth and youth, aging and sickness, despair and death are full of *dukkha*. Suffering being inherent in the very fabric of life, the sermon further states, a person experiences it through five factors: 'grasping' (*upādāna-skanda*), material form (*rūpa*), 'feeling' (*vedanā*) experienced both physically and mentally, 'cognition'/'recognition' and interpretation, constructing activities shaping characters (*sanskāra*) and consciousness (*vijñāna*). The second sermon which is a sequel to the first, detects the cause of all suffering (*samudaya*) in 'desire' whereas the third sermon is devoted to eradication of suffering (*nirodha*) through desiccation of desire. Cessation of *dukkha* in Buddhism consists in detachment, renunciation of worldly pleasure and unconditional surrender of passion to meditation, self-control and sacrifice with pity and compassion for the ailing mankind. The ultimate goal of Buddhism is *Nirvāṇa* which can be attained by transcending the cravings through total destruction of the fire of attachment, hatred and delusion and the questions of birth, aging and death (Harvey: 60-61). *Nirvāṇa* is the cessation of all

dulikha and it points to a life of enlightenment beyond death which is experienced in the state of *Tathagata* (perfect).

While professing the Cathartic doctrine of purity and sexual abstinence, the Troubadours of Southern France, however, grounded their aesthetics of pain and suffering in 'desire'. Andrea Capellanus, an authority on the theory of courtly love, enjoins that "Love is an inborn suffering and an ever-increasing desire (Capellanus: *The Art of Courtly Love* ,) which is finally chastened through ordeals of suffering, and then spiritually directed towards enlightenment through an elaborate paraphernalia of worship, service, sacrifice and meditation upon the beloved lady (domna), the lady Sophia (Lady Philosophy) in Troubadour poetry. No doubt , desire for the beloved is the starting point in courtly love, but through constant burning, suffering, swooning ,service and sacrifice for the beloved, the lover is chastened and elevated spiritually to the position of a saint- a stage in which his baser desires are transmuted into pure and divine emotion bereft of carnal passion and physical possession. It is a stage in which the lover-saint desires nothing, but the blessings of the beloved domna for which he surrenders himself totally to her in suppliant knee which is strongly reminiscent of the *bhakti* tradition of medieval Vaishnavism in India and the idea of 'feudalization of love' and midon(domna)-vassal relationship of the castle lady and the medieval knight so powerfully presented in the Provencal lyric poetry (cansos) of the Troubadours like Arnaut Daniel, Bernart de Ventadorn and Raimbaut de Aurenga. Troubadour philosophy is in this respect more akin to Tantric Buddhism that celebrates the power of *Śakti* rather than the Orthodox Buddhism. However, one fundamental point to be noted here is that Troubadours foregrounded their aesthetic on the Cathartic philosophy of separation of the soul from God and the Buddhist concept of suffering and spiritual illumination/elevation through an elaborate process of discipline and control.

II

John Keats, often eulogized as a poet of warm world of senses celebrating the poetry of Earth as 'never dead', seems to have been influenced by Cathartic-Troubadourian aesthetic of dualism on the one hand, and the metaphysics of pain as adumbrated in Buddhist philosophy on the other. His interest in Provencal thought, medieval knighthood and Troubadour concept of separation, suffering in love and a haughty domna(mistress) can be discerned in the poems like *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, *Ode to a Nightingale*, *Ode on a Grecian Urn* and *The Eve of the St. Agnes* that celebrates an ideal world of romance and ecstasy. Though his friend Shelley used to call him a 'Greek' because of his copious references to and heavy leaning towards Greek mythology and aesthetics, Keats too built up his spiritual home in the romantic and supernaturally surcharged setting of the Middle Ages and, surprisingly, in the myriad forms of beauty, religion and philosophy of India on the other. His interest in Indian thought in the backdrop of cultural confluence between the East and the West therefore needs an elaborate discussion.

It is a fact that cultural interaction between the East and the West has been a continuous phenomenon, and that it is more predominantly so since Alexander's

invasion of India in 327 B.C. which facilitated dissemination of Hindu and Buddhist thoughts in the West. Alexander himself learnt lessons in Hindu and Buddhist philosophy from one Kalanos, an ascetic from Taxila, and his concepts of 'world-religion' and 'world government' were in fact grounded upon the Vedic message of peace (*Śānti*) and one family on the Earth (*vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam*). Megasthenes, who came to India as the ambassador of the Greek prince Seleucus, gave to the West in his *Indica*, an interesting account of the socio-cultural condition of Ancient India, whereas the Buddhist work *Milindapanha* records that the city of Alexandria was a confluence of different cultures, including Hinduism and Buddhism, as it was regularly frequented by merchants from India. Prof. E.R. Dodds (1936:11) emphatically observes that the Greek culture arose against the oriental background, and that India, the fount of Asiatic consciousness, had always played an active role in this regard. With the fall of Alexandria in 642 A.D., the cultural interaction between the East and the West fell into the hands of the Arabs, and the Arab scholars, invaders, merchants and traders tended to negotiate between the two worlds by introducing Indian silk, spices, cotton and precious stones into the European market. During the rule of Abbasid Caliphs, the Arab court was frequented by Greek and Hindu merchants and scholars, and several Sanskrit texts, both secular and sacred, were translated into Arabic and then to Latin and French for their easy reception in Western Europe (Nicholson, 1977:361). Among these texts, mention may be made of *Arabian Nights*, *Panchatantra* and *Buddha Jatakas*. But this commercial relation and cultural negotiation suffered seriously following the fall of Constantinople in 1458 A.D., which hampered the cordial commercial transaction and cultural relation between Muslims and Christians. With the advent of the Renaissance, the silk route was replaced by the sea route through which the struggle for Indian market by the European nations began, and the Portuguese, Spaniards, Dutch, French and finally the British – all fought for possessing India, the land of beauty and gold.

During the Renaissance, be it court or countryside, city or parliament, people talked everywhere about sea and adventure, trade and commerce, Indian silk and jewel, Arabian scent and oriental wealth. In the mouth of Antonio, Shakespeare in his *The Merchant of Venice* (111.ii,270) tells us about England's commercial connection with the East including India, which is further evidenced from his picture of the cargo of spices and bales of silk (1.i,33-35). Whereas Christopher Marlowe evinced a keen interest in Indian gold, pampered jades of Asia, Oriental pearl, mines and metals in *The Jew of Malta* (1.i.30-32) and *Dr. Faustus* (1.i.79-80), Shakespeare in *The Troilus and Cressida* (1.i.103-105) conceives of Troilus an adventurous merchant, and Cressida, an Indian Pearl: 'Her bed is India; there she lies a pearl!' Even as Marlowe and Shakespeare evinced keen interest in Indian wealth, silk, stones and metals, John Dryden and Sir Robert Howard were inspired by the Indian heroic themes of high passion, courage and adventure characterizing the Moghuls, and wrote heroic tragedy. Dryden's *The Indian Emperor* (1665) and *Aureng Zebe* (1675) and Howard's *The Indian Queen* (1664) bear brilliant testimony to this fact. What is remarkable to note here is that the

Renaissance writers were influenced by the interesting travelling accounts of Greek, Arabian, Italian, and French travellers like Megasthenes, Marco Polo, the French Bernier and the Venetian Ibn Batuta, and by the various translations of Sanskrit and Buddhist texts, which continued to exert tremendous influence during 18th and 19th centuries as well.

Ever since the publication of the English prose translation of the *Bhagavad Gita* (1785) by Charles Wilkins, *History of Hindustan* (1793) by Thomas Maurice, *The History of Hindostan* (1768) by Alexander Dow, *Hindu Pantheon* (1810) by Edward Moor, *The Curse of Kehama* (1810) by Robert Southey and the monumental translations of various Sanskrit texts besides very many Asiatic research papers contributed by the famous Orientalist Sir William Jones, there started an Indian Renaissance in England. In the introduction to his book, Dow provides a detailed account of the Hindu mythology, Hindu pantheon and various schools of Indian philosophy like Nyaya, Sankhya, Vedanta, Buddhism and Jainism. K.G. Srivastava in his remarkable research work *Bhagavad Gita and the English Romantic Tradition: A Study in Influence* (2002:129) emphatically observes that “much before Wilkins and Jones, he had provided the English men a very authentic account of the achievements of the Hindu mind in the realms of religion and Philosophy”. Robert Sencourt in his powerful book *India in English Literature* (1920 : 285) makes a significant remark that the Orientalists opened a ‘mine’ for the romantic poets. Obviously then the influence of Wilkins, Jones and Maurice on the English romantic poets deserve special mention. John Drew in his masterpiece *India and the Romantic Imagination* (1987:45-80) speaks high of the influence of Jones, Maurice and Wilkins’ translation of the *Gita*, which ‘occasioned excitement’ (Drew:80). Drew further maintains that Thomas Maurice was ‘perhaps the most influential’ in that he discussed the incarnations (avatars) of Lord Vishnu, which influenced both Coleridge and Keats. Time and again, Coleridge alludes to the ‘Brahmin creed’-now in *Biographia Literaria* (1975:77) and the next moment in a letter addressed to his friend Thelwall on 14th of October, 1797: “...I adopt the Brahmin Creed, and say- it is better to sit than stand, it is better to lie than sit, it is better to sleep than wake, like the Indian Vishnu, to float along an infinite ocean cradled in the flower of lotus, and wake once in a million years for a few minutes just to know that I was going to sleep for a million of years more.” (Griggs, 1956-71:350). Here Coleridge points to the ‘meditative pose’ and ‘blessed mood’ which is significant for both Hinduism and Buddhism. Coleridge, for that matter Keats, has in all probability borrowed the idea of Vishnu/Vishna from Maurice’s *History of Hindustan*. Significantly, while talking about Avataravada in his letter addressed to George and Georgiana Keats (14th February- to 3rd of May, 1819), Keats, unlike Coleridge, uses the word Vishnu as Saviour and Mediator, and refers to the personified abstraction of gods in mythology, which strongly reminds the reader of the possibility of Keats’s acquaintance with Vedic mythology through Maurice, Coleridge and Jones, who wrote series of hymns to Vedic gods and goddesses in form of translation. Interestingly, Keats’s friend Shelley wrote his “*Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*” under the impact of Jones’ nine hymns to deities

like Narayan, Surya, Gayatri, Savitri, Durga, Kamadeva, Indra, Lakshmi and Bhavani. Drew (234) maintains that in Shelley’s *Hymn*, ‘Platonism had been absorbed by the Indian Vedanta tradition’. It is also tempting to analyze Keats’s *Ode on a Grecian Urn* in the light of Vedantic wisdom and Buddhist concept of pain. It is a fact that Keats was very enthusiastic about India, and wanted to undertake a voyage to India; and in *Endymion* (1V.33), he invokes ‘Indian Bliss’, ‘Indian maid’, ‘My sweetest Indian’ and the ‘Ganges,’ the most sacred river of India. K.G. Srivastava (316) asserts that Keats used to attend Coleridge’s public lectures with ‘great enthusiasm’ and therefore his understanding of Buddhism was enriched by Coleridge’s fertile philosophic mind. In his analysis of Coleridge’s *Kubla Khan*, John Drew calls it an ‘oriental poem’ (206) and the emperor a Buddhist; and draws references to Kashmir, the Paradise on the Earth and to Tantric Buddhism in which there are concepts like ecstasy and Great Bliss (*Mahā Sukha*). Paradise in Buddhism is sitting enlightened on a lotus, and Kubla Khan’s dome is in fact a pointer to the abode of bliss. Srivastava argues that Keats ‘knew some of the doctrines of Buddhism’ (310). In his letter to his friend John Hamilton on 19th of February, 1818, Keats talks about a stage of ‘ripeness in intellect’ and a spiritual passage for illumination which is decidedly Buddhist. By referring to thirty two palaces of delight, and a happy voyage towards illumination and ecstasy (‘what delicious diligent indolence’), the romantic poet indicates in all probability the concept of Nirvana or Bliss in Buddhism. Srivastava interprets that the thirty two palaces are admittedly drawn from the philosophy of Buddhism insofar as they point to the thirty two signs of an illumined soul as adumbrated in *Lalitavistara* and *Buddhacharita*. Each of these signs signify a palace of delight which Keats wishes to attain. Keats, Srivastava opines (310), may have gathered the idea about various palaces of delight from Edward Moor’s *Hindu Pantheon* (1810).

III

John Keats was perhaps the most romantic of all the younger English romantic poets, and his romanticism was, in most part fore-grounded upon a kind of weird sadness. This is all the more evident from the undercurrent of nameless melancholy and numberless woes that are experienced by Keats under the overpowering influence of the pain and miseries of the world as depicted in his odes and *The Fall of Hyperion*. The odes, which strike us as the crown of Keats’ achievement, are serious musings on the dichotomy between the ideal and the real, between permanence and impermanence strongly reminiscent of the Buddhist message that mutability and impermanence characterize our existence. It is our ignorance (*avidyā*) and ignorant craving that cause all suffering. It is in our sheer spiritual ignorance that we dream/think that “a thing of beauty is a joy forever” (*Endymion*). In “Ode on Melancholy” Keats is painfully aware of the transience of life and beauty:

She dwells with Beauty—
Beauty that must die

Like a Buddhist, Keats is fully aware of the fact that life is full of sorrows and sufferings, and that joy on the earth is nothing but ‘aching pleasure’, a desperately

fragile and transient thing. In ordinary/visible sense, suffering encompasses birth, old age, sickness, death, grief, lamentation and distress and is further extended to suffering caused by lack of personal fulfillment and separation from the desirable object/person. Thus says The Buddha:

“Being united with what is not liked is suffering, separation from what is liked is suffering, not to get that one wants is suffering” (P. Mishra, *An End to Suffering* 191).

The suffering that Buddhism attests, is both physical and mental. The sufferings of Keats’ brothers (George and Edward) from tuberculosis are physical, whereas Keats’ own frustration and lack of fulfillment in love in separation from Fanny Brawne is mental. And this awful state of frustration and separation can be poignantly expressed in terms of the Troubadourian concept of ‘passion’ as suffering in separation from the “la Belle Dame Sans Merci” (the beautiful lady without mercy). The physical and mental states of suffering have been poignantly presented in “Ode to a Nightingale” through an apt contrast between the ecstasy of the soul represented by nightingale on the tree and the physical pain experienced by the poet –listener rooted on the ground. In Upanishadic scheme of thought, there are two birds on the tree in every human form: one that enjoys (body) physically and suffers, and the other that observes and remains ecstatic in detachment from the ‘forbidden fruit’ of the tree. The nightingale is, therefore, an ‘immortal bird’ that knows not the bitter bread of suffering and that doesn’t taste the ‘hemlock’ of the world disease epitomizing birth, youth, old age and death. The poet’s heart aches and a sort of drowsy numbness pains his ‘sense’ as though ‘hemlock’ he has drunk to sink towards Lethe, the river of forgetfulness in Greek mythology signifying death. At the same time, Keats comes closer to Buddhism in that every human being is born to this world where intense desire for consummation of passion results in despair and loss of paradise. To him, ours is a horrible world:

Here, where men sit and hear each other groan,
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs,
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new Love pine at them beyond tomorrow.

(Ode to a Nightingale; III.4-10)

The lines quoted above succinctly state the Buddhist message that suffering hovers at every door because no happiness is long lasting. Since desire is the root of all sufferings, Buddhism enjoins that one should renounce desire, and for that matter love, because separation from beloved causes suffering. As stated in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Buddhism also reiterates the same truth that desire breeds attachment (*sangāt saijāyate kāma*), and non-fulfilment of desire leads to anger, frustration and suffering. Desire is by nature like fire, and once one desire is fulfilled, human beings go after one

hundred and one desires and in the process, suffering is multiplied because permanence and lasting fulfillment of desire is an anathema in this world of mortality. In Troubadourian aesthetic, therefore, separation is preferred to possession in romantic love, because the moment the beloved is possessed, true longing ceases to be, and the true lover lands in hell and violates the very vital theory of courtly love that ‘blindness’ is a bar to love. In “Ode on a Grecian Urn”, Keats therefore proclaims the Troubadourian theory of love epitomized by the urn:

Bold lover, never never canst thou kiss
... Forever wilt thou love, and she be fair !

While singing to the tune of Buddhism, Keats intensely realizes that impermanence characterizes worldly existence, and that ‘human love’ is prone to suffering. Therefore, he searches for an ideal world of permanence, now in nightingale and the next moment in the Grecian urn that epitomize ecstasy and permanent bliss. In both the odes under discussion, the romantic poet oscillates between ideal and real, between permanence and impermanence, and his metaphysical quest for permanence and spiritual illumination/enlightenment is evident from the telling contrast between ‘heard melody’ and ‘unheard music’ with a desire to escape the world of pain and suffering to land up in the world of ecstasy and eternal joy epitomized by the ‘urn’ and the nightingale. This is strongly reminiscent of the Buddhist concept of renunciation and detachment from worldly pleasure. Keats’ presentation of the urn as an ‘unravished bride of quietness’ and a ‘foster child of silence and slow time’ justifies his increasing awareness of the transitoriness of worldly things and his longing for sweeter ‘unheard music’ (music of the soul from within?) because heard music is ephemeral and is played to the pleasure of the ‘sensual ear’ only. The romantic poet cherishes eternal happiness which is more forcefully conveyed in the third stanza of “Ode on a Grecian Urn” with its repeated emphasis on ‘happiness’ which is far above ‘all breathing human passion’ that frustrates one to remain aggrieved with a ‘high sorrowful’ heart, a ‘burning forehead’ and a ‘parching tongue’: ‘Ah, happy happy boughs !’. Surprisingly, the word ‘happiness’ is repeated six times in the stanza which justifies Keats’ longing for eternal bliss strongly reminiscent of the Troubadour concept of jois (joy) attained by the blessings of the beloved goddess on the one hand, and the Tantric concept of the abode of bliss (*mahāsukha*) on the other. This is further evident from his irresistible desire for ‘More happy love! More happy, happy love!’. Keats’ desperate quest for permanence as against impermanence can be located in his love of art and Nature, epitomized by the ‘urn’ and the ‘nightingale’ respectively. He equates the urn with eternity and mystifies it because the ‘silent form’ has the miraculous power to tease us out of thought, although it is nothing but a ‘cold pastoral’. Keats’ maddening haunt after permanence is evident from the very opening stanza of “Ode to a Nightingale” where ‘pain’ is contrasted with ‘happiness’, epitomized by the song of the nightingale:

Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
But being too happy in thine happiness.

Strongly reminiscent of a Buddhist's preparation to renounce the world of pleasure is the poet's desire to be 'away! away':

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known
The weariness, the fever, and the fret

Analyzed in terms of Buddhism, the above lines point to the most fundamental fact that Keats wishes to attain *Nirvāṇa*-illumination and enlightenment- in the land of the nightingale that epitomizes immortality and perfection, ecstasy and illumination. Therefore, he desperately wishes to forget the 'embalmed darkness' that signifies ignorance (avidya) as against spiritual illumination and light. The land of *Nirvāṇa* knows no death and hence the immortal picture of the bird of Eternity:

Thou was not born for death, immortal Bird !
No hungry generations tread the down

Self annihilation constitutes a significant aspect of Keatsian aesthetics/ metaphysics which is grounded upon the dialectics of pleasure and pain and the poet asserts that immortal poetry arises out of human suffering alone thereby vindicating the philosophy of Buddhism, Catharism and Troubadourism. In his "Sleep and Poetry", Keats is deeply aware of the futility and transitoriness of the sensuous perception of beauty. What is worth -noticing about the poet is the way he embraces sacrifice and prefers to brave the spectacle of human suffering. He is not a sentimental weakling to be cowed down by the sufferings in life. With his matured vision characteristic of a man of dispassionate action as characterized in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Keats proposes to respect pleasure and pain with detachment and is inclined to live through sacrifice. To live well is to die well, and to die well is to necessitate the concept of living well. The Keatsian metaphysics of pain therefore entails that there is pleasure in drinking away, like Lord Siva, the hemlock of life and the world:

Yes, I must pass them for a nobler life
Where I may find the agonies, the strife
Of human heart.

To Keats, as it is for the Troubadours, pain is pleasant, and therefore in 'The Fall of Hyperion' he emphatically proclaims that immortal poetry arises out of human suffering alone:

None can usurp this height, returned that shade,
But those to whom the miseries of the world.
Are misery, and will not let them rest.

(The *Fall of Hyperion*, 147-49)

Even in a poem like *Hyperion* which was supposed to be written as an escape into the remote world of Greek mythology from the misery of nursing the poet's dying brother, Keats tended to express an experience of agony and suffering relished by Saturn and raised the perennial question of how such unhappiness and agony were to be endured by immortals. Keatsian aesthetic in *Hyperion* reveals his deeper insight

into the tragic aspects of life. Beauty is not only the fountain-source of 'joy' and 'truth' forever, it is also intertwined with pain and suffering. An experience bereft of sadness belongs to an inferior order of beauty, and as such a true votary of beauty, should search the 'most-soul searching sorrow' in the very 'Temple of Delight'. The path to real beauty lies therefore through the realm of sorrow. And obviously in *Hyperion*, beauty is perfectly blended with sorrow in the picture of Thea:

But oh: how unlike marble was that face.
How beautiful, if sorrow had not made
Sorrow more beautiful than Beauty's self

Behind Keatsian aesthetics of pain, here one locates the stamp of the Buddhist ethics that emphasizes pity (*karuṇā*) for suffering (*dukkha*) and sympathy for every form of sentient life. The commandments in Buddhism call upon humanity not to kill, not to harm, but to feel pity and become perfect and this view is incompatible with world negation. In his unfinished poem *The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream* (I. 154- 60), Keats echoes the Buddhist principle of pity and compassion and holds that the work directed towards the wellbeing of humanity is the surest path to salvation.

It is the problem of suffering that prompted both Buddha and John Keats to go in quest of the 'temple of delight' (*mahāsukha*) and *Nirvāṇa* (Enlightenment) respectively. Needless to say, Buddhism takes recourse to a systematic course of ascetic discipline which encompasses chastity and sacrifice, humility and non-violence, vegetarianism and compassion, detachment from the material world and promotion of pacifism. But Keats' metaphysical quest to overcome the anguish and suffering of the impermanent world aimed at social making and self-abandonment. In his letter to George and Georgiana Keats (April, 1819), he rejects the Christian concept of 'valley of tears' and accepts 'vale of soul-making' which is more akin to oriental thought; and to him, there are different stages through which a soul passes/ progress while discovering misery and suffering through experience. Keats compares the progress of soul to 'chambers in a mansion' and it is through the progressive journey by crossing different chambers that the soul finally attains the highest stage of the 'temple of delight' (mansion) and gets illumination after having recognized the burden of the mystery of life and the world. Strangely enough, the 'temple of delight' in Keatsian aesthetics can be correlated with his ideas of 'thirty two places of delight' which reminds an Indian reader of Keats, of the thirty two qualities of a great man (*mahāpurusa*) as described in the context of lord Buddha in *Lalitavistara*, and of the 32 palaces/ places of human body (Srivastava: 310) where the Saiva saints / tantrics use sandal paste for making the places holy and esoterically surcharged with spiritual significance. Be what it may, the objective/ goal of Keats' metaphysics/ aesthetics of pain is loss of self-hood (*mamabhāva*), and self-awakening through suffering. While correlating Keats' 'pleasure thermometer', with Zen awakening (Satori), Richard P. Benton (1966 : 33-47) maintains that Keats' metaphysical quest is fore-grounded upon gradual loss of self-hood through suffering and detachment and that Keats realised the ideal Zen state of being that

means transcendence of the dichotomy between pleasure and pain, between self and the not-self (Benton : 47).

Interestingly, it is also highly probable that Keats derived inspiration, for this idea, from the concept of maintenance of the world-order (*lokasaṅgraha*) as advocated in the *Gita* (III.20) Similarly, the emphasis on selfless work, sacrifice and well-being of the world in *Gita* and Buddhist texts finds its dignified presence in *The Fall of Hyperion* where the poet glorifies selfless people. Like the ‘*Indian karmayogi*’ a selfless man can attain perfection (*siddhi*) symbolized by the shrine of goddess Moneta:

Who love their fellows even to the death;
Who feel the giant agony of the world;
And, more, like slaves to poor humanity
Labour for mortal good.

And through the rejection of narcotics and suicide as the ways to escape sorrows and sufferings, the poet of *Ode on Melancholy* registers his resistance to the temptations which melancholy brings in its train:

No, no! not to Lethe, neither twist
Wolf’s-bane, tight-rooted, for its poisonous wine;
Nor suffer thy pale forehead to be kissed
By nightshade, ruby grape of Proserpine;
Make not your rosary of yew-barries,
Nor let the beetle, not the death-moth be
Your mournful Psyche, or the downy owl
A partner in your sorrow’s mysteries

Robin Mayhead observes that the resistance to temptation here is in line with ‘moral fortitude’ in order to keep ‘one’s sorrows in check’. This is strongly reminiscent of the Buddhist therapy of overcoming pleasure and pain with the help of the boat of discipline in the complex river of life. The journey is in the words of Zimmer “from the shore of spiritual ignorance (*avidyā*), desire (*kāma*), and death (*māra*), to the yonder back of transcendental wisdom (*vidyā*), which is liberation (*mokṣa*) from this general bondge”(1969: 475). In course of this arduous journey, Keats seems to suggest that one should not seek easy escape from sorrow and that one should feel and experience ‘the wakeful anguish of the soul’ calmly and patiently, and then proceed progressively for the highest moment of transcendental illumination.

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BOOK REVIEWS

James Seaton, *Literary Criticism from Plato to Postmodernism : The Humanistic Alternative* , Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp.225.

Literature is surely not science, nor is literary criticism a *scientific* inquiry into the nature and function of literature on the basis of any universally agreed standards of proofs and empirical methods. Literary value cannot be judged in terms of scientific or empirical objectivism, but in terms of human values. “Literary criticism”, the author writes, “may be seen as a continuing conversation among three traditions, two of them originating with Plato- the Platonic and the Neoplatonic – and the third, founded by Plato’s student Aristotle which may be called the Aristotelian or humanistic tradition.” (pp.1-2) Literature is surely not theology to offer any account of the divine beings or ways for any religious / spiritual devotion. Instead, it offers an insight into the states of human life itself, and again that insight is not accessible to any scientific or empirical experiment.

The humanistic tradition, as the author observes, begins with Aristotle, revived in the Renaissance, proceeding on through Pope, Johnson, Arnold, James, Edmund Wilson, Trilling and Ralph Ellison. The book contains seven chapters: The first offers an account of the origin of the two rival traditions- Plato and the Neoplatonists on one side and Aristotle on the other. The second chapter argues that the Romantics and some of the modernists followed the Neoplatonists. The third chapter is on the contemporary critical waves called “cultural studies”, “cultural theory” and “critical theory”. The author offers an original and bold account of these two wings in an excellently concise form. The fourth chapter offers an account of Aristotle and the humanist tradition-from Horace to New Criticism, and the fifth one devoted to Edmond Wilson and Leonel Trilling. The sixth chapter highlights the notion of popular culture that he traces in the Western Critical tradition much before the advent of “cultural studies” in academic circle, but of course without treating art and literature as data for sociology. The claim for “apostles of equality”, as the advocates of the post-colonial, Frankfurt school and “cultural studies” make for themselves, has been rejected by James Seaton. It Arnold pleaded for the notion of culture as the best that has been said and known, Eliot defined culture as the way of life of an entire society that “includes all the characteristic activities and interests of a people”. Besides, there are Yeats, Orwell, Marsha Bayles and many others who appreciated (mass) popular culture including all forms of artistic activities. In this context Seaton discusses Ralph Ellison’s notion of democracy. The final chapter correlates literary criticism, the Humanities and liberal education, particularly in the American context.

Seaton’s critique of the contemporary cultural studies including critical theory and cultural theory that originate in New Marxism, Derridean deconstructionism and Foucauldian anthropology is very sharp and bold. The socialist base of Edward Said’s interpretation of the colonial prejudice in treating the Oriental culture exposes the political stunt of the West put under the garb of democracy. In addition, Derrida’s theory of difference, differance, deconstruction and dissemination, and Foucault’s

theory of power have given rise to several modes of literary studies such as feminism, racism, classism, gender approach, postcolonial and subaltern perspectives, almost all of them constituting the genus of cultural studies. Cultural studies, writes Hayden White, “is a neo-Marxist activity”. Seaton considers the *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* in its two editions (2010) as the canon for contemporary criticism acknowledged by the departments of English and cultural studies. This anthology sets the standard for studying literature as a cultural artifact:

Literary texts, like other art works, are neither more nor less important than any other cultural artifact or practice. Keeping the emphasis on how cultural meanings are produced, circulated and consumed the investigator will focus on art or literature insofar as such works connect with broader social factors, not because they possess some intrinsic interest or special aesthetic value. The subsumption of literature into the broader cultural field explains the wide spread perception that cultural studies poses a threat to literary criticism. (NATC, 2478)

This Marxist attitude is clearly in opposition to the humanistic view of Romanticism and that of the subsequent writers of the Victorian and post-Victorian modernist age: “Poetry is indeed something divine. It is at once the centre and circumference of knowledge; it is that which comprehends all science, and that to which all science must be referred. It is at the same time the root and blossom of all other systems of thought; it is that from which all spring, and that which adorns all, and that which, if blighted, denies the fruit and the seed and withholds from the barren world the nourishment and the succession of the scions of the tree of life.” (Shelley, NATC, 135). This humanistic view was subsequently echoed by Arnold, Leavis, Pound and Read. Leavis writes, “For not only poetry, but literature and art in general, are becoming more specialized; The process is implicit in the process of modern civilization. The important works of today, unlike those of the past, tend to appeal only at the highest level of response, which only a tiny minority can reach, instead of at a number of levels...” (NATC, 213-14) Read’s opposition to industrialization is clear: “I despise this foul industrial epoch– not only the plutocracy which it has raised to power, but also the industrial proletariat which it has drained from the land and proliferated in hovels of indifferent brick” (NATC, 58-59).

Seaton’s scrutiny of the sources and nature of critical theory exposes the self-contradictory standing of this movement. Plato is condemned for his logocentrism and foundationalism, but on the same footing the cultural (critical/ Frankfurt School) critics express their strong Platonic prejudice when they prefer theory to literature; while building up an utopia of republic they “seek a society in which theoretical reasons will rule, unconstrained by the customs or ‘prejudices’ of the past conveyed so seductively by novels, plays and poem. Many see their theorizing as part of ‘a movement to eradicate gender, race, class and sexual prejudice’...” (Seaton, 54) Such a movement does not allow any room for Homer, Dante, Keats, Austin and James. The self-contradiction involved is only self-evident when the critical theorist is skeptical about

“norms” (a postmodernist view), but at the same time is “ethical”, i.e. some norms must be affirmed, without answering which norms. Seaton refers to Barbara Christian’s critique of the critical theorists who are no more concerned with literature but with their critics’ tests, with linguistic jargons, mechanical analyses of language, graphs, algebraic equations and gross generalizations about culture.

The ‘Theorists’ “are contemptuous of common sense, derive radical cultural and political change, and are confident that theory rather than literature provides the key to understanding human life”. (Seaton, 59) Although this statement sounds an echo of the Platonic preference to “theory” in the sense of philosophy of Idea, The prophets of post-modernism such as Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida and Rorty target him as the founder of foundationalism, logocentrism and essentialism. When one questions the “theorists” which theory, the answer is any theory – political, social, economic- particularly, a critique of the American late capitalism responsible for the rise of new categories of literary criticism such as Marxist, psychoanalytical, New Historicism, Feminist, gender criticism and Black criticism that mark their difference from humanistic criticism and acknowledge their respectability in the postmodernist era. In this context Seaton cites respectfully the theoretical works of Rene Wellek and his coauthor Austin Warren in *Theory of Literature*. It is not any theory or any idea that is relevant in case of literary theory, but theories and ideas *about literature* that should be the concern of a true literary theorist. That is what Wellek has done in his eight-volume *History of Modern Criticism, 1750-1950*, and together with Warren compared the leading ideas of English and American critics with the most significant developments in European thought about literature, shaping several generations of critics.” (Seaton, 62)

Wellek has rightly judged that the contemporary zest for ‘Theory’, is virtually destruction of or “attack on literature”. In his sincere efforts for reviving the humanistic tradition Seaton remembers Kermode, Abrams, Leavis, Trilling, Chicago Critics and others along that line. His bold remarks that the hegemony of “Theory” adopted by the disciples of Marx and New Marxists and of the psychoanalytic criticism of Lacan founded on Freud is on the wane as is Marx’s prediction about the future of capitalism and socialism discarded by the history of the last century. Likewise, a reader of the psychoanalysis section of the NATC should realize that the scientific standing of Freud’s theory is today almost as low among psychiatrists as Marx’s among economists.

We must agree with Seaton that the contemporary literary theorists and critics have lost their ways for assessment of the central point of literature, i.e., human value, and instead chase the ghost of ‘Theory’ that always evades them, and perhaps will do so till its final evaporation.

John V. Kulvicki, *On Images: Their Structure and Content*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, pp.258.

While proposing to amend Goodman’s account of representation, an account modeled on linguistic frame work, the present author forwards an account of representation on Saussurean structuralist linguistics: a representation is an image

not by virtue of its perceptual character, but by its relation to other members in the non-linguistic system of representations – a parallel to Saussure’s signifieds as concepts: “The concepts are purely differential and defined not by their positive content but negatively by their relations with the other terms of the system. Their most precise characteristic is in being what the others are not.” *Course*, 117. The sub-title of the book thus clarifies the structuralist approach to images. The author is certainly justified that the influential theories of representation during the twentieth century were mostly dominated by the perceptualist accounts of Gombrich, Wollheim, Goodman and the host of their followers.

The book contains five chapters under the section of Image structure, five chapters under the section of image content and two chapters under the last section he titles Realism and Variety.

By “image” the author means pictorial representation: “The goal of this book is to explain just ‘what’. That means with a focus on what makes pictorial representations special is that they seem to occupy a corner of a continuum of representational kinds. Descriptions and other linguistic kinds of representation seem to occupy the opposite corner with diagrams and graphs being the mongrels in the middle? (p.1). But again, he writes, “What makes a representation pictorial or diagrammatic is not how we perceive it, but how it relates to others, syntactically and semantically within a system of representation. ... What it is to be pictorial is to be a representation that relates to other representations within a system in the right way.” (p.6) Clearly, on the very axis of Saussurean structuralist, semantics that an acoustic image is meaningful not by virtue of any inherent natural property but by virtue of its difference from other such images, the author is unwilling to accept the perceptual theories of pictorial representation offered by critics such as Ernst Gombrich, Nelson Goodman and Arthur Danto. In the five chapters of the first part the author discusses Goodman’s theory reflecting upon both its merit and lapses that set the stage for presenting four structural conditions including transparency that constitute an account of representational kinds, drawing out the consequences of this account that accommodates, the vast variety of representational kinds including auditory and tactile representations. He claims that this part offers a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for a representational system to be pictorial.

The second part shows that a working account of representational systems can inform an account of why the perception of some is special. The author shows that the transparent representations are interesting because they are instances of their own bare bone contents – i.e., pictures manifest the very properties that their bare bone contents attribute to their objects, and here is the difference between the perception of pictures or pictorial representations and other kinds of representations such as diagrams and descriptions. This observation might be confused with the sense data theory of perception, which may be a bad theory of perception itself, but very useful for distinguishing between the bare bones and fleshed out contents of a pictorial representation. In fact this was the concern of the modernist painting, i.e., the central

concern of painting is the art of painting itself and not the representation of other things. In other words, this move leads to a total rejection of the Aristotelian theory of *mimesis*. Contemporary theory of realism is related to informativeness the amount of information a picture conveys about its object. But in the 3rd part the author argues that neither verity or truthfulness nor informativeness— says anything about the picture itself: “It is misleading to call verity and informativeness two dimensions of realism since, strictly speaking, they apply to different things: individual representations and systems thereof. Whether we compare individual representations as members of a system or as standing for systems themselves varies quite a bit, however, and this is why verity and informativeness often seem to be merely dimensions along which individual representations are compared.” (p.9)

Although representation has been basically an ocular concept, Kulvicki observes that its area of denotation has been extended too far around in the current critical thinking (see also Ananta Sukla, *Art and Representation*, 2001). Understanding representation as a phenomenon of stand-for or aboutness directs our notice to a number of artifacts such as linguistic expressions, gestures, sounds, maps, diagrams, graphics, pictures, photographs so on and so forth. Representations are then multi-perceptual, not only visual. The author then classifies the whole range of representations into three categories, linguistic, pictorial, and in between them the mixed ones i.e., graphs and diagrams. These three kinds differ in their contents according to the sense-modality of their representative properties- auditory, visual, audio-visual, and these representative properties are not determined in terms of their perceptibility, but in terms their syntactical and semantic relationship with each other.

All images are representations and all pictures are representations. But all representations/ images are not pictorial. A system is imagistic, if it is relatively replete, syntactically sensitive, semantically rich, and mimetic though not necessarily transparent, whereas picture or pictorial images are necessarily transport. The mimetic representations relate to the more general class of isomorphic representations. The author replaces Goodman’s “Characteristic Constitutive Aspects” (CCP) by “Syntactically Relevant Projectiles” (SRP), and holds that a representational System (S) is mimetic with respect to a set of properties (C) if and only if the following four conditions hold. (p.83)

- 1) All the members of C are SRPs of S
- 2) All the members, P of C are such that representations in S can determinately represent their objects as being P.
- 3) All representations in S that determinately represent their objects as being a member, P of C are themselves P.
- 4) All representations in S that are P determinately represent their objects as being P.

Then concludes (p.85), “These four conditions are necessary and jointly sufficient for mimesis with respect to a set of properties in a representational system”. Mimesis entails similarity and the similarity entailed is semantically significant:

“transparent representations are all mimetic.” An important and quite valid point that the author puts up is that all pictorial representations need not be visual or even perceptible in general. Many non-visual systems that are apparently non-pictorial turn out to be pictorial – even an auditory representation may be pictorial. Thus the author demonstrates that a pictorial representation can also be inter-medial. This inter-medial perspective of mimetic images are then merely rhetorical. This ekphrastic approach to pictorial representation now alters the century-old aesthetic hegemony of visual and auditory perceptual experiences as expressed in the axioms *ut pictura poesis* and *ut musica poesis* during the Classical and Romantic eras. If auditory images can be pictorial and pictorial images tactile (justifying Keats’s hyper-sensuous image-making and image-experiencing power broadening the human value of fictionality in general) then the aesthetic power of man supersedes his scientific cognitive power. As a specialist in philosophy of perception Kulvicki is aware of the limits of empirical realism, and in his discussion he deviates from the analytical methodology of the linguistic philosophy, and approaches the issue of image from the interperceptual (and, therefore intermedial) perspectives. In sidetracking the earlier linguistic approach to image such as that of W.J.T. Mitchell, (and, therefore the Wittgensteinian perspectives that have remained the foundational model so far) Kulvicki wants to say that pictorial image need not be (and cannot be) interpreted in terms of the linguistic paradigm. The issue is preeminently a perceptual one involving all our sense organs not merely eyes (agreeing with Gombrich that there is no innocent eye, implying thereby that there is no innocent sense organ in general). Realism, verity and transparency are compared by the author. Realism refers to informativeness whereas verity refers to representations within a system. Informativeness applies inter-systemically, and verity intra-systemically. They are not two dimensions of realism. Cartoons, for example are realistic in terms of informativeness, but in terms of cartoonish system they are realistic. Kendal not Walton’s account of pictorial realism, an amalgam of verity, informativeness and a third ingredient related to the first two might be called “mimicry”, i.e. pictorial realism varies in degree in terms of our perceptual engagement with the picture and that with the perception of the object the picture depicts. In other words, realism in a picture varies in degree according to our perception of the picture as a mimicry of the perception of the object. But Walton’s theory of mimicry fails when our perception of the mythical pictures are taken into account.

Kulvicki’s subtlety of observation, critical judgment and original approaches to the structural analyses of the images draw our attention to a new horizon of aesthetics of pictorial art. He is bold, sufficiently learned, and very well informed of the critical appliances necessary in calling the doyens of pictorial aesthetics to questions and amending their flaws.

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